SERAPHINA;

OR,

A WINTER IN TOWN.

A MODERN NOVEL,

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY CAROLINE BURNEY.

VOL. II.

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SERAPHINA;

OR,

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MAHARAJA SERFOGI'S S... MAHAL. THE TANJORE

CHAPTER VIII.

A Fine Lady.

THE slight manner in which Mr. Lessingham appeared to think of Seraphina's beauty, put Lady Avondale into the most perfect good-humour. From *his* opinion, which she deemed infallible, she was induced to believe that the world would regard Seraphina's charms

with the same degree of indifference. The *oracle* of *fashion* had decided upon their merits, and therefore Lady Avondale no longer regarded her friend as a formidable rival in the general admiration she wished to monopolize.

Impressed with this pleasing idea, her ladyship instantly became the most affectionate friend in the world, and insisted upon giving up a party she had been long engaged to for that evening, in order to enjoy the society of her "*dear* Seraphina," although that lovely girl entreated that she might not be a bar to Lady Avondale's pleasure, since the idea of going to bed *early* was preferable to any other, to one so fatigued as she then felt herself. "Your ladyship says you do not go until ten o'clock,"

said Seraphina, "and at *that* hour I am accustomed to retire for the night."

"Oh, you antediluvian creature!" answered Lady Avondale; "you must not talk of such hours *here*, or you will be hooted at. I seldom call for *tea* until *ten* o'clock; this evening we had it early on your account."

"No wonder you have lost the fine bloom I used to admire, Sophy, if those are your hours," said Dr. Melbourne.

"Heavens, doctor!" exclaimed Sir Percival, "you cannot surely mean what you say. Lady Avondale's bloom is unfaded, as every eye may now witness."

"Lady Avondale's bloom is not like Sophy Pembroke's, let me tell you," answered the doctor, abruptly. "To *you*, who know no better," continued he,

"she may pass that bloom off as genuine, but *I* study nature too closely to be so imposed upon; I know the pencil of art, nor can her most cunning witchcraft deceive me."

Lady Avondale bit her lip; but instantly recovering herself, she said, with a good-humoured smile, "Dr. Melbourne is so accustomed to the ruddy cheeks of the Welch lasses, that the more delicate tints of town beauty appear faded in his eyes.

"What a *tramontane!*" said Mr. Lessingham softly to Lady Avondale. "Where was the *Native caught?* I suppose he thinks every body must be like his *Blouzelinde*, with her vulgar complexion."

"Hush! for Heaven's sake, my dear

Lessingham; I will not hear my *lovely friend* depreciated."

"Then your ladyship must not shew yourself in the same company, for who can help drawing the comparison? and every person of *taste must* feel where the advantage will preponderate, if that is done."

"Silence, flatterer!" said her ladyship, putting her fan upon Mr. Lessingham's lips.

He bowed, in token of obedience, and she then seated herself by the side of Seraphina, having previously insisted, with much gravity, upon the removal of Sir Percival Egerton from what she styled his *monopoly*.

Sir Percival yielded with reluctance.

"But who," said he, "disputes the commands of Heaven?"

"Always in the *heroics*," said her ladyship, with a sprightly air. "Seraphina, you must beware of Sir Percival; he is the greatest flatterer in England."

"I am not of your ladyship's opinion," answered Seraphina.

"How so!" asked Lady Avondale.

"Because I never had so many rude things said to me by any body as by that very gentleman."

"Heavens, Miss Melbourne!" exclaimed Sir Percival; "what can you mean?"

"I mean," said Seraphina, "that when a man addresses *direct* compliments to a woman, he calls her a fool by craft, and that cannot be very flat-

tering to her feelings, if she happens to have sense enough to detect it."

"Ah! Miss Melbourne," replied Sir Percival, "I perceive that you are as superior to the generality of your sex in intellect as in beauty; yet I fear, in spite of all your humility, you will be often in danger of *direct compliments* from admirers who dream not how fatal they will prove to their future hopes. For my part, I will profit by the lesson you have given me and worship your divine image, for the, time to come, with *silent* adoration."

Seraphina laughed at the air of solemnity with which Sir Percival pronounced these words. "You have a mind," said she, good-humouredly, "to indulge your wit at the expence of

the *country miss*; but I forgive you, as I doubt not but at some future time you will give me an opportunity of being even with you."

"I know what I could say," said Sir Percival, "if compliments were not prohibited; but I am silent *per* force. Permit me to ask, however, if such a miracle should happen as that of your being *even* with *me*, is it to be brought about by your descent from the altitude of superiority, or my happy elevation?"

"What people ask when they profess to be silent," said Seraphina, laughing, "certainly requires no answer."

"How do you do, Egerton?" said Lord Avondale; "I think you have caught a *Tartar*. What say you, man?"

"I have *caught* my death I believe,"

returned he, "for I feel strong symptoms creeping upon me. I have been seriously thinking of *one* object for near an hour and a quarter, by the French clock in the chimney."

"A very alarming symptom," said Lord Avondale; "and if it should continue, I would advise you to make your will. Did such a thing ever happen before?"

"Never that I remember."

"To prevent its dangerous continuance then, let us leave the scene of temptation," said Lord Avondale. "I will play you and Lessingham at billiards, until the carriage is ready to take us to Lady Newington's."

"Impossible!" answered Sir Percival;

"I cannot leave the magic circle until compelled by fate."

"I insist upon your immediately accepting Lord Avondale's challenge," said her ladyship; "I want to get rid of both you and Lessingham. So begone, and let me hear no murmuring at my decree."

'*So Adam looked when from the garden driven,*
'*And thus disputed orders sent from Heaven,*'

Said Sir Percival, as Lady Avondale rose to enforce her commands.

'*Like him I go, though to depart I'm loth,*
'*Like him I go, for* ANGELS *drove us both,*'

YOUNG.

"Enough, enough," interrupted her ladyship; "you have grown so poetical lately, there is no bearing you. So begone; I have a thousand things to say to my dear friends that are not for *mortal* ears."

Sir Percival smiled, bowed, and obeyed, and with the other gentlemen, departed for the billiard-room, to the no small relief of Seraphina, who was already weary of the notice she attracted.

"I am glad those coxcombs are gone," said Dr. Melbourne, as soon as the door was shut. "I don't mean your husband, Sophy—he is *pretty well* for a *lord;* but that formal baboon, you call Lessingham, and that chattering marmoset, the baronet, put me out of all patience. I am astonished how you

bear such society, Soph; you that have been used to the communion of exalted minds, surely you might select something superior for your intimate friends."

"What cathedral notions you have, my dear doctor!" said Lady Avondale, smiling.

"You must not quiz my friends though, I assure you; they have not shewn themselves to advantage to-night, or you could not have been so severe upon them. Mr. Lessingham, who is Lord Arpington's brother, is allowed, by the best judges, to be a belle esprit, and as to Sir Percival Egerton, he is the life of every society he mixes with.—Don't you think him a charming creature, Seraphina?"

"Oh, to be sure she does," an-

swered Dr. Melbourne. "Give Sery something to laugh at, and she is sure to be pleased."

"Seraphina must not laugh at a man of Sir Percival's consequence in society, if she wishes to be thought any thing of herself," replied Lady Avondale. "Do you know, he is one of the richest commoners in England, and has besides, a claim to a title, that, if decided in his favour, will make him one of the oldest earls in the peerage. You remember poor Lady Emily Storrondale, don't you, doctor?"

"To be sure I do," answered he. "But what of her?"

"Why, you know, she married that Italiannified animal, Lord Cremona, and died in child-bed of her first child."

"True," answered the doctor; "but they were *all* dead before your time, Sophy, surely, so what do you know about them?"

"Oh, the story has been just revived," said Lady Avondale; "people talk of nothing else. They say, Lord Cremona poisoned his wife, and that the child, who was supposed to be dead, is alive in some obscure corner of the world. Certain it is, that a claim has been put into Chancery by a pretended heir to the estate. Sir Percival Egerton is the heir at law, if Lord Cremona died without children, but even a daughter would supersede him in both title and estate, as they are both entailed upon the female, as well as the male line.—Lord Cremona, after his wife's death, returned

to Italy, and his fine mansions both in town and country have been shut up ever since; for at his death, which happened about four years ago, a claim was instituted in the Court of Chancery by a soi-disant daughter of Lord Cremona, who being a minor at the time, became a ward in Chancery, and the matter cannot be decided until next term, when she will attain the age specified in her grandfather's will, for acceding to the estate. Sir Percival is determined to stand trial, and is not without strong hopes that this pretended heiress will turn out an impostor. Every thing relating to this affair has been managed with such a degree of mystery, and the acting agents in the business are people of such doubtful character, that it is

most people's opinion, that Sir Percival will be triumphant—a termination which I devoutly pray for. A young man of such infinite spirit cannot possess too large a fortune for the good of mankind."

The reader will perhaps wonder that Dr. Melbourne, who had just before spoken of Sir Percival Egerton in terms of contempt, should listen with patience to the detail of his private affairs; it is certain, nevertheless, that he not only attended to the relation with a degree of emotion that astonished Lady Avondale.

"You seem strangely interested, my good sir," said her ladyship, "in the affairs of a man you affect to despise."

"I knew poor Lady Emily Storron-

dale," answered the doctor, " when she was quite a child, and loved her as I believe she richly deserved. I never saw her after she was fifteen, but I understand she grew up as amiable as she promised to do. Her character was universally esteemed, and she was lamented at her death by every body, I believe, excepting her cruel husband. Oh! that marriage was more cruel than the sacrifice of Iphigene; I cannot bear to think upon it. I can believe any atrocity that is imputed to Lord Cremona, for he resembled the Italian fiend, his mother.—The interest I feel," continued the doctor, " is for the reputed offspring of his lovely victim, and I shall be one of the most active investigators of this dark affair."

" Heaven forbid you should establish the rights of this pretended heiress," said Lady Avondale; " it would disappoint so many charming schemes that are in embryo to celebrate Sir Percival's accession to that immense fortune."

" Heaven forbid I should fail of establishing the *just* claim, let that be which it will," answered the doctor, emphatically; " no effort of mine shall be wanting, I assure you."

" Sophy," said Lord Avondale, who just then entered the room, " do you really intend giving up Lady Newington's to-night."

" *Certamenti*," answered her ladyship; " you must make my excuses, my lord."

" Adieu then," said his lordship; " Dr.

Melbourne will kindly dispense with my company, and the fair Seraphina will find ample amusement in the store of town anecdotes, with which your ladyship's memory can furnish her. Percival and Lessingham would not return to interrupt the *confidential communion*, as they call it; but they desired me to make their compliments." So saying, Lord Avondale made his bow, and departed.

"Your husband seems very good-humoured Soph," said the doctor, "so I hope you are happy."

"How Gothic your ideas are, my dear doctor," answered her ladyship, yawning, "you really give me the vapours."

"And pray for what reason?" asked

the doctor sternly, "you are not ashamed of loving your husband I hope."

"Loving my husband! How strangely you talk, my good sir; don't you know we have been married three years—you never heard of the honey-moon lasting so long as that to be sure."

"Girl, girl, I am ashamed of you," said Dr. Melbourne, "it is you who talk *strangely*. Your worthy father and mother have been married these thirty years, and are not ashamed of loving each other dearly. My happy state of wedlock is not of shorter date, yet is the affection that first cemented it undiminished—tell me then, by what modern refinement of folly I find you who have been brought up under the influ-

ence of such examples so degenerate in your opinion?"

"Now you take the matter quite seriously, my dear sir, and I spoke only *en badinant*. Lord Avondale and I jog on vastly well together, he is, as you say, very *good-humoured*, and I am not ill-tempered, so we never quarrel; but *loving*, my good doctor, is quite out of the question, it is considered so antediluvian to live a Darby and Joan life now a-days, that I am sure Lord Avondale would not be willing, if I were to adopt that system."

"I am concerned to hear it," answered Doctor Melbourne, "the respect that is paid to the opinion of the world, as a junta of fools is now styled, is the cause of half the depravity of the pre-

sent generation. Seraphina," continued he, gravely, "I desire that *you* do not *follow the multitude to do evil.* Consult your own heart, it is inexperienced, but it is innocent, and you may rely upon it, that it will never deceive you."

"Seraphina will be a phœnix, I dare say," said Lady Avondale; "but my dear doctor, it is a folly to expect more than one of those wonderful birds at a time—you know the thing is impossible."

"Well," said the doctor, "let me have my candle, and I will go to bed, if you please, and we will sermonise a little more another time."—As he spoke, he rang the bell, and the servant appearing, Dr. Melbourne desired to be shewn to his apartment.

"Would not you like to take a sandwich, doctor?" asked Lady Avondale.

"No, thank you, I never eat suppers. Good night, I leave you to your gossip's tale, which most women love better than victuals and drink, or even sleep itself. God bless you, little Sery," continued he, kissing Seraphina's cheek, who had risen to salute him. "Heaven preserve your *purity*, you remember who said that. I believe the poor boy was right enough."

"Who does Doctor Melbourne allude to?" asked Lady Avondale, as soon as he had left the room. "What *boy* was afraid of my lovely friend's purity?"

"Oh, your kind brother Edward—

you know he was always my mentor, and he felt very anxious when he knew I was coming to London, lest my giddy head should mislead me, and get me into some scrape."

"Apropos—is Edward as contemplative as ever? I have a thousand questions to ask about my dear family: how is Fanny? Does she give way to melancholy—I think he and she would make excellent recluses."

"Edward is as *amiable* as ever," answered Seraphina, "I believe he possesses the best heart in the world, and therefore it would be a pity he should quit it to become a recluse; and as to my dear Fanny, she is too great an ornament of society to be likely to leave it. The natural goodness of her dis-

position would effectually prevent her from indulging in melancholy, even had she cause, which I hope is not the case."

"Indeed, I don't know that she has any just cause for melancholy," said Lady Avondale. "I only imagined it might be the case, as I believe there was a little *affaire de cœur* between her and a very amiable young man, whilst she was in town; but like all love stories, it was a very silly affair throughout, and I never gave it any encouragement. If people of *fortune* chuse to please themselves in marriage, it is very well; but for a portionless girl, like Fanny Pembroke, to preach about invincible attachments, I have no patience to think of it. Do you know she re-

fused a most advantageous offer, because, forsooth, her affections were *pre-engaged.*"

"You would not surely, have approved of Fanny's giving her hand where she could not bestow her heart?" asked Seraphina, with unfeigned surprise painted on her countenance.

"Ah, my dear girl," said Lady Avondale, "I perceive you have imbibed all the narrow prejudices that distinguish the pupils of the good folks at Llanfallen. My mind was once shackled by their circumscribed opinions; but, thank Heaven, a more intimate acquaintance with the world, has dissipated the cloud of error, and my mind is become enlightened by the pure doctrine of right reason."

"You would find it difficult to make converts of Edward or Fanny, I believe," said Seraphina, sighing; "they respect the sage instructors too highly, from whom they have received the precepts that now guide their conduct, to be very easily persuaded to adopt the tenets of any new doctrine."

"The mere effect of seclusion," answered Lady Avondale, "which nothing but an intimate commerce with the world can destroy."

"I hope then," answered Seraphina with warmth, "that they will never encounter the temptation, unless they are strong enough to resist its baleful influence; for I must own, from the idea I have formed of the world and its en-

franchising principles, I think the exchange would not be in their favor."

"A rebuke, in the form of a definition," said Lady Avondale, smiling; "thank you, Seraphina: this at least is not one of Sir Percival Egerton's *direct compliments*; you do not think *me* improved. Do you, my sweet girl?"

"It is not wonderful," said Seraphina, "that a pupil of the *good folks* at *Llanfallen* should admire the unsophisticated *agremens* of a simple daughter of nature, in preference to the more dazzling accomplishments of a fine lady."

"Very well, Sery," answered Lady Avondale, "I see you can be severe, in spite of all your seeming simplicity."

" Not *severe*, dear Lady Avondale, merely *candid*; you asked me a question, and then you must expect a sincere answer. I have not yet learned to disguise my sentiments."

" That is a lesson you must learn immediately, my dear girl," said her ladyship, " or you will make sad mischief in the world."

" Then I cannot stay in it," answered Seraphina; " for I detest duplicity, and hope I shall never be tempted to use it."

" How plainly one may see who has been your companion. I could shut my eyes, and fancy Fanny was talking to me. She was so very *sincere*, I was obliged to shorten her visit in town, for she became quite intolerable."

" When you find me *intolerable*," replied Seraphina, smiling, " pray give me notice, and I will return to Llanfallen."

" Ah, my dear," said her ladyship, " I trust you will shew the superiority of your understanding, by pursuing a different line of conduct. I forgive you all the little prejudices of a confined education, and consider you at present, ' neat as imported.' The polish of fashion cannot fail, however, of working miracles in a mind so capacious as yours, and I flatter myself, the day is not far distant when Miss Seraphina Melbourne will be amongst the foremost leaders of ton."

" No, no," said Seraphina, " the parting exhortation of my dear Edward,

is too forcibly impressed upon my mind, to suffer the innovation of any other principles."

"*The parting exhortation of Edward*, my dear creature, you make me laugh. Come now, I will put your boasted candour to the test; is not Edward one of my dear Seraphina's dying swains? Nay, never blush, it is so assimilating to class sighing lovers with shady bowers and purling streams."

"Your ladyship is widely mistaken for once, for I never had a lover in my life," said Seraphina; "and as to Edward, I am sure he is the last person in the world that would think of me in that light; why, he does nothing but find fault with me from morning till night. My lessons were never perfect

enough for him, and then I used to laugh too much for his gravity. Oh, I am sure, the very idea of Edward for a lover, is diverting. I dare say he would be ready to smile at it himself."

"I know," said Lady Avondale, "he is a great quiz, but I am glad to find you have brought your heart whole to London, and I desire you will not dispose of it without consulting me."

"I don't think I shall dispose of it in a hurry," said Seraphina, "for I am too giddy to think *seriously* of any thing at present, and surely *that* must be a matter of great importance."

Lady Avondale laughed. "If you never think *seriously* of any thing," said she, "how come the parting injunctions of Edward to be so piously remembered.

Take care, little Sery, I am rather suspicious."

"When I think of Edward," said Seraphina, "it must be *seriously*, for no other idea assimilates with his image, and I consider him as a friend and a brother, to whose opinions I pay implicit deference."

"I hope," answered Lady Avondale, "ere long, to introduce a more suitable mentor to guide my lovely friend through the labyrinth of life, than she could ever hope to find in such a sequestered animal as my brother. Edward is an absolute book-worm, and knows as much of men and manners as an Anchoret."

"When I feel inclined to adopt a line of conduct different from the one

he recommended, I hope I shall be at liberty to quit the dangerous atmosphere that could engender such degenerate ideas."

"Come, my dear girl," said Lady Avondale, "let us drop this subject for to-night, and by retiring to bed at an early hour, acquire a degree of strength proportioned to the fatigue that awaits us to-morrow."

"What fatigue must we encounter to-morrow?" asked Seraphina. "I hope it will not be a very serious one; for if it is, I fear I shall not be equal to it."

"Oh, don't alarm yourself, my dear," answered her ladyship. "I meant only the delightful fatigue of driving from one magazine of taste to another, to procure those appendages of fashion so necessary

to the appearance of a young lady of Miss Melbourne's consequence."

"My consequence is of recent date, if I have any," said Seraphina, laughing, "for I never heard of it before."

"Twenty thousand pounds, and the reversion of more than three times that sum, will give you some degree of consequence in the eyes of our men of ton," said Lady Avondale. "Plutus is our tutelary god, and incense is offered on his altars, instead of the blind god's. The catalogue of the *necessaries* of life is now swelled to such an enormous size, that money is the only desideratum this world can offer. Love is, therefore, out of the question in modern matches, as a *principal*, a little may be thrown into

the scale, if it so happens, but it is by no means indispensable."

"Fie! Lady Avondale, what a picture you draw of high life," said Seraphina, gravely. "I declare I am more than half inclined to entreat Doctor Melbourne to let me return to dear Llanfallen before the *original* can disgust my eyes or deprave my heart."

"Better just take a *peep*, *chicken*," answered Lady Avondale, laughing, "the naughty people shan't run away with little missy before she has had time to look about her."

"You may laugh at my *provincial* ideas as much as you please," said Seraphina, smiling, "but my most ardent wish is, that I may keep them untainted amidst the general depravity."

" Sweet *saint* amidst surrounding *sinners!*" interrupted her ladyship—then ringing the bell, when the servant appeared—" Tell Baily to attend me in my dressing-room," said she, " and see that Miss Melbourne's maid is called to undress her lady."

" Oh, she is gone to bed, I dare say," said Seraphina, " I never keep her up to wait upon me, and particularly after so long a journey."

" That may do very well for Llanfallen, my dear, but you will find it will not suit a *London* life," said Lady Avondale, as she shewed Seraphina to her apartment. " I find we have imported a large stock of goodness, *and all that sort of thing*, and I hope every thing *fashionable* will be added unto it. So

good night, my *good* girl, sweet dreams attend you." So saying, Lady Avondale left Seraphina to the care of her abigail, who had not retired to rest, as Seraphina expected, or as was her usual custom. The truth was, that dazzled by the splendour of Lord Avondale's steward's-room party, the good Welchwoman had been tempted to keep her eyes open to stare at their second-hand grandeur.

"Good lack-a-day! Miss Seraphina," said Mrs. Evans, as soon as Lady Avondale had withdrawn, "there are fine hisy prisy doings in the servants' departments in this house; it has quite made my hair stand an end to see their extravagance, and to hear all their proud talking. 'Tis the world turned topsy

turvy, that's for sartin. I am sure his reverence would not approve of such doings if he was to see them."

"Hush! Evans," said Seraphina, "we are not come here to criticise upon our friends. Lord Avondale's house is managed according to his will, Doctor Melbourne's according to *his*."

"No such thing, ma'am, I assure you," said Evans, eagerly, "Lord Avondale has not got his will, no more nor nothing at all. No, no, it's all as my lady pleases, and she's bravely altered since she left the parsonage, or else they tell strange stories of her."

"My good creature," said Seraphina gently, "I know your heart too well to believe you could be wilfully ill-natured; but indeed you must not talk thus be-

fore me. So good night, for I see you are full of intelligence."

"Ah, that's so like you, always so considerate to every body. Well, Miss Sery, I will go to bed, for as you say if I stay, I shall be sure to chatter. So God bless and protect your purity, as poor Mr. Edward said. Oh, I wish we were out of this wicked town!"

"Amen," said Seraphina, and Mrs. Evans departed.

CHAP. IX.

An Old Story.

SERAPHINA slept serenely through the night, and awoke the next morning at her usual hour. The weather was fine, and in spite of the fogs of London, the sun darted into her room in full splendor. "My fatigue has vanished," said Seraphina, mentally, "and I will get up, for I suppose poor Evans feels the effects of her journey more seriously than I do."

The sweet girl began the labours of her toilet unassisted, but had not half finished them, when the door opened, and Mrs. Evans entered in a mighty fuss.

"Ah! I thought you would be up, Miss Sery," said she; "you are none of their slug-a-beds—shame upon them! they are all snoring in their beds, and their windows barred up, as if daylight would poison them. I have been groping about for this hour, and could not find my way here, nor any body to shew it to me; at last, who should come to my assistance, but his reverence! So when I once got upon the great staircase, I knew where I was, and I have been up and down every where, and not a crea-ture can I see; and I declare, it is al-

most eight o'clock. Oh! the world's turned topsy-turvy, that's for certain."

"Come, my good Evans," said Seraphina, "help me on with my gown, and never mind reforming the inhabitants of this house."

"Who, *I reform* them! God forbid, Miss Seraphina, *I* should have any thing to do with such a pack of heathenish folks. But lack-a-day! I am quite afraid you'll be starved, miss, for I'll lay a wager there'll be no breakfast these two hours."

"Oh, no," answered Seraphina, smiling, "I am in no danger of starving, for I shall find ample employment in arranging my books; so come and help me to unpack."

"Yes, Miss Sery, as soon as ever I

have folded up your things.—La! only to think what a little bit of a thing you was when I folded up your things in London before!"

"My dear Evans, how you talk!' answered Seraphina; "you know I never was in London before."

"Lord love your dear heart! that's all you knows of the matter. Why I was the first person as nursed you after the old Scotchwoman. My good lady brought me up from Wales on purpose, when his reverence wrote her word what a sweet baby he had got for her; and there that wicked old jezabel of a Scotchwoman wanted to make my poor mistress jealous, and to insinuate, in her sly way, as if you was a spurious child of his reverence's. To be sure, it was

rather an oddish story that he told about finding you; but as my good lady believed it, why to be sure it was her servant's duty to do so too."

"My dear Evans, you surprise me so, you cannot imagine, by what you say; I always understood I was the orphan daughter of a distant relation of Dr. Melbourne's, bequeathed to his sole guardianship by my mother on her death-bed."

"Lack-a-day! miss, perhaps I ought not to have said a word about it to you, but as it has slipped out, I cannot help it, so I'll tell you all I knows of the matter.—It is now about eighteen years ago, that his reverence went to London, as he might do now, and left my lady behind. So after he had been gone

a little while, he sent a letter to my lady, desiring her to come up to London as fast as possible, and to bring me with her, for he had got a sweet baby for her to take care of. So, my lady, she was as pleased as could be, for she was very fond of children, and never having any of her own, she was fain to take notice of other people's. So she ordered me to get ready; and I was young and lissom then, and was not long about it, so we set off at a few hours notice; and then my lady did nothing but talk to me all the way about the pretty child she was going to have, and wondered whose it could be, for Dr. Melbourne had not said a word about that in his letter; but, lack-a-day! when she got to London, and seed his

reverence, and they had a little confabulation together, she was as close as could be, and never mentioned the subject to me again, only once just to say, ‘ Betty, if any body asks you any questions about the dear little girl, don't satisfy them.'—‘ Dear heart, my lady,' says I, ‘ you need not be afraid of me, for it would be very queer if I was to go for to satisfy any body about a thing I have never been satisfied about myself.'—‘ Well, well,' says she, ‘ no matter: it is of no consequence who the child is; she will be our's from henceforth.'—‘ Lord love her sweet face!' says I, ‘ she's a pretty creature, but I should like to know who she is for all that.' So then my lady looked quite angry like, and I was afraid of saying

any more about it; but when I got with the old Scotchwoman, I found she was pumping me, so I was determined I'd pump her; so I'll tell you what I picked out of her."

"But tell me, Evans," said Seraphina, "who do you mean by the old Scotchwoman?"

"Lack-a-day! I forgot you did not know that. Why, miss, the old Scotchwoman was Mrs. Calder, who kept the house where his reverence lodged, and a queer old tyke she was to be sure. So I tell you, miss, she tried all as ever she could to persuade my lady as you was his reverence's child; but lauk! she might as well have talked to the wind. So then she set her wits to work to find out who you really did belong to;

and so after a deal of pains, she said, she believed she had hit the right nail upon the head, for she said, she thought you must belong to some of the Royal Family."

"How ridiculous, Evans!" exclaimed Seraphina. "Why do you repeat such nonsense to me?"

"Lack-a-day! miss, don't be angry, for it is not impossible, you know; and one thing I found out myself."

"What was that, pray?"

"Why, that his reverence did not know himself who you belonged to; but I never told it to a Christian soul before; for I overhead him talking to his wife. So you know, I ought not to have listened, but I was so curious you cannot think, miss; it haunted me night and day.—Well, at last, do you know,

miss, when I was carrying you round the bason in the Green Park, I believe they call it, there was a nasty sallow-looking foreigner wanted to take you out of my arms, and run away with you, but I was too many for him, and I got home safe without losing you. So then his reverence ordered post-chaise and four, and off we were in a jiffy, before old Scotchy knew where she was. Oh, God forgive me! but I always thought she was at the bottom of that plot."

"But, my dear Evans, what should any body want to steal me for? Your story is so romantic, and so improbable, that upon my word, I can hardly give credit to it."

"Well, miss, you must do as you please about believing me, but I assure

you, what I tell you is true enough. Lauk! it is no such strange thing they should want to steal you away; for I dare say, when old Scotchy found out as you belonged to the Royal Family, she went and told some of the great lords of the Parliament House; and so then they ordered as you should be tooked away, and shut up somewhere, for fear you should come to the crown, as I have read in an old book that lies in the library at Rosemount."

Seraphina burst into a fit of laughter, as Mrs. Evans concluded her speech, which quite disconcerted her faithful attendant.

"Aye, you may be as unbelieving as a Jew, if you please, Miss Sery, but mark my words, you will come out to

be some great body or another, when you least think of it. Why, lauk! you had fine jewels in a casket lapt up in your mantle, and your clothes were all trimmed with fine lace, and a *crown* worked in the corner of the pocket handkerchief that was laid over your face. Mrs. Calder told me all about it. Besides, she said, all her family were gifted with *second sight*, and she knew by that art as you were of a royal stock. Those were her own words; and though I have not got second sight, as they call it, yet I always thought you looked like a princess when I had dressed you."

Whilst Evans was endeavouring, with the most serious earnestness, to convince Seraphina that she was a *princess in disguise*, that giddy girl continued to laugh

in the most provoking manner. When she recovered from her risible fit, enough to speak, " Come, my good creature," said she, " and help her *Royal Highness* to put her books in order."

" Lack-a-day! Miss Sery, don't be so '*tantalizing*,' as dear Mr. Edward used to say. But that is always your way—laugh, laugh, laugh, and teaze, teaze, teaze; you used to put poor Mr. Edward in the tantarums many a good time with your provokingness."

" Are there any symptoms of *royalty* in that disposition you so pathetically describe, Evans?" asked Seraphina.

" Don't say any more about it, miss, I beg," answered Evans; " for I see you don't believe what I say, and so we

had best drop it; time will shew who is right."

It may not be amiss to observe in this place, that Mrs. Evans, who is just now introduced, is the identical Betty mentioned in the second chapter of these memoirs—that she had continued in Dr. Melbourne's family ever since that period, where she was esteemed as she deserved to be, as a faithful servant, and an excellent heart. She was indeed a worthy woman; her integrity was above temptation, and her religious principles of that steady, yet simple kind, which are the only sure guardians of an uncultivated mind.

Mrs. Melbourne had wisely selected this faithful servant to attend upon her beloved Seraphina, in preference to one

who was younger, and of a more refined education, and who had till now acted as Seraphina's maid.

Lucy was extremely mortified when she found she was to remain with Mrs. Melbourne at Rosemount, whilst Mrs. Evans was to take her place in the post-chaise, with the doctor and his ward, to the charming metropolis, whither her imagination had never ceased to wonder from the first moments she had heard of her young lady's intended journey, little supposing the disappointment that awaited her; for she relied upon her superiority in the art of dress-making, and the other arts of the toilet, too much to think it possible that such a dowdy as Mrs. Evans could supplant her at such an important period as that of

her young lady's debût in the great world.

Whilst Seraphina and her attendant had been arranging her books, &c. &c. in her dressing-room, and descanting of the probability of the lovely girl being a sprig of royalty, Dr. Melbourne had let himself out at the street-door, and strolled into Hyde Park, to inhale the fresh breeze the fine morning promised to bestow upon those, who, like himself, would break the bands of sleep to court its wholesome influence.

He had almost reached the first gate of Kensington Gardens, when he was overtaken by a gentleman on horseback, with his groom following. They passed without his observing them, until the gay livery of the Storrondale family

struck his eye; he then recollected that it was Lord Storrondale's invariable custom to take an early ride in fine weather, notwithstanding the late hours his commerce with the fashionable world obliged him to keep.

Dr. Melbourne instantly quickened his pace, and as his lordship rode slowly, he presently overtook him, and was recognized with unfeigned pleasure by his old friend, who, giving his horse to his groom, immediately took hold of his arm.

"Melbourne," said his lordship, "you are the very man I have been wishing to see; and I was fearful, as you had made it so late, that you would not come to town this year. What have you been doing?"

Dr. Melbourne then told his lordship, that as he had determined upon bringing his ward up with him, he had deferred his journey until the spring, that being the most fashionable, as well as the pleasantest time for a young person to see London for the first time.

" Still so considerate for the young," said his lordship, smiling.

" Were I not naturally inclined to be so," said the doctor, " my little girl would make me so."

" Apropos! is your ward handsome?"

" Your lordship shall judge for yourself," answered Dr. Melbourne, " for I intend she shall pay you a visit."

" Really!" said his lordship, looking surprised. " You do me great honour, Melbourne; but would not the visit

seem more proper to Lady Storrondale?"

"Her ladyship might not feel so interested, perhaps, in the welfare of my little girl, as I am persuaded your lordship will, when you see her," replied Dr. Melbourne.

"Upon my honour, doctor, you are incomprehensible this morning," said his lordship: "you certainly know my natural devotion at the shrine of beauty, but until this moment, you never seemed inclined to indulge my reigning propensity."

"Nor do I feel the least inclination to do so now," replied the doctor; "your lordship has known me long enough to be assured of that. I have a very particular reason for wishing you to see Sera-

phina, which I do not chuse to explain until after the interview."

"Well, you shall be indulged in your mysterious wishes, Melbourne, at any time you shall please to appoint; but in the meantime, I want to talk to you upon a subject nearest my heart. You remember poor Emily I think."

"Perfectly well," said the doctor; "you mean the amiable Countess of Cremona."

"The same," said his lordship. "Did you ever see her after her marriage?"

"I am not quite certain upon that head, but I remember her ladyship well, just before she went abroad with her mamma; she was a lovely creature at that time," answered the doctor.

"Oh, beautiful as an angel! That scheme of my wife's, of taking the child abroad was ultimately the cause of both their deaths; but I suppose you know that melancholy story as well as I do," said Lord Storrondale.

"Pardon me, my lord," answered the doctor, "I am wholly unacquainted with the particular circumstances that led to the melancholy events you mention, and at this moment, feel myself extremely interested to learn them, if your lordship will so far indulge me."

"By all means," replied Lord Storrondale; "and that we may not be interrupted, I will send Ben home with the horses, and you and I will walk into the gardens. But perhaps you have not breakfasted."

" I have not," answered Dr. Melbourne, " but am more eager to devour your lordship's narrative, than the best plate of muffins that could be set before me."

Lord Storrondale then ordered his groom away with the horses, and arm in arm with Dr. Melbourne, entered Kensington Garden Gate.

The morning was remarkably fine, and the weather so warm, that after walking some time, they seated themselves in one of the arbours.

" I have been particularly unfortunate," said Lord Storrondale, as he threw himself on the seat, " in my sacrifices to Hymen; I have been married to *three* beautiful women, and yet few men ever had less domestic bliss to boast of."

"If your lordship had married them all at the *same time*, I should not feel surprised at such a declaration," said the doctor, drily.

"Heaven deliver me from such an idea!" replied Lord Storrondale; "that would have been too much for Job himself. And yet if I could have met with a woman who combined all the qualities of the three in one, I might have been happy. But I must endeavour to be rather more concise, or your corporeal appetite will supersede your mental one. So to proceed:—You remember the first Lady Storrondale. She was one of those high-souled women who set up virtue for an idol, and like Nebuchadnezzar, insist that every body shall fall down and worship the same idol, without

daring to sacrifice to any other deity. Charmed with her beauty during the first year of our marriage, I conducted myself in a manner so irreprehensible, that I established myself firmly in the dear soul's good opinion. This was sufficient to insure me ample liberty of conscience afterwards. Above the mean suspicions of her silly sex, Lady Storrondale placed the most unbounded confidence in my virtue, and her dearest friend would have been instantly discarded, had they dared to breathe a word against the lord of her affections. I must own, I felt so anxious to preserve her good opinion, that I sacrificed, during the time she lived with me, all *domestic* intrigues, which was a great effort on my part; and I do really

think, had it not been for the unfortunate affair that terminated our happiness, I should have become, in time, the good husband I pretended to be.—You must have heard, Melbourne, of Marrinelli, the Italian woman I kept."

"Yes," answered the doctor, "I heard of it with astonishment and disgust. How a man possessed of such a lovely woman for a wife as Lady Storrondale certainly was, could degrade himself so far as to lavish his caresses on a monster of ugliness and paint, like Marrinelli, might well puzzle a mind so shackled with narrow prejudices as mine."

"You are right enough, Melbourne. Marrinelli had nothing to recommend her, except her skill in music, and her

unparalleled effrontery; the former caught me in her toils, and the latter kept me her slave long after I despised and abhorred her. But to return to my story.— This female fiend could not content herself with the princely donations I heaped upon her; her inordinate vanity could be satisfied with nothing less than the mortification of my wife, and she laid her schemes so artfully, that she obtained her ends before I suspected what she meditated. Lady Storrondale was the soul of charity, and her character for benevolence was so well known, that she was continually applied to by the unfortunate of every denomination. Of this, Marrinelli was apprised, and she availed herself of that circumstance to wreak her vengeance

on the innocent object of her hatred. The artful wretch framed a letter in the most pathetic language, describing herself as an unfortunate foreigner in the greatest distress, bereft of all support, and wholly unacquainted with the language or customs of the nation she was in. This epistle was written in elegant Italian, and expressed, amongst her other wretchedness, that the unhappy writer was under the most dreadful apprehensions that she had fallen into the hands of mercenary women who intended to sell her for the vilest purposes. The letter concluded with the most earnest entreaty that her ladyship would call upon the distressed petitioner at such an hour, when she would give her benefactress the most ample proofs of the truth

of her assertions.—Lady Storrondale, who judged every heart by her own, was caught in the net that was spread for her, and kept the fatal appointment. The diabolical Marrinelli had fixed an hour when she knew I should be with her, and my poor unsuspecting Emily was introduced into the apartment where we were, just at the moment when I was on my knees before the detested syren, with her hand pressed to my lips—a situation which she had drawn me into by the most artful blandishments. Never shall I forget the shame of that moment, when rising from my knees with the confusion inseparable from guilt, I raised my eyes to the pale countenance of my wife! At first, I hoped, that led by jealousy, she had been induced of her own

accord to penetrate the secrets I had concealed from her; but the illusion was momentary, for pulling Marrinelli's letter from her pocket, with an air of dignity that I cannot describe, she put it into my hand. 'I leave it to your lordship to find out who was the author of that infamous scroll. Let it serve as my excuse for my present intrusion, and rest satisfied, my lord, that it is the last you will ever have to complain of from *me*.' So saying, with the majesty of a superior being, she quitted the room, and left me overwhelmed with rage, surprise, and shame.—It was but a poor satisfaction to me that I immediately kicked the infamous author of my vexation out of doors—that I loaded her with abuse and reproaches; she only laughed at my

impotent vengeance. The wealth she had amassed through my blind profusion, had rendered her independent of my bounty, and she left me only to spread the hateful tale as far as the wings of slander could bear it.—It was in vain I endeavoured to pacify the anger of Lady Storrondale; she was inexorable to all attempts at reconciliation. Her affection never knew the happy medium, she must either adore or despise, and she continued firmly resolved to separate herself, for ever, from the man she could no longer esteem. The Duke of Cardiffe, her uncle, was just then going to reside some time in Italy for the recovery of his health, and she entreated, as the *last* favour she should ever request of me, that I would permit

her to accompany him, and to suffer her to take her daughter Emily with her. In an evil hour, I consented; and during my wife's residence at Naples, she contracted an intimacy with the Cremona family, and married my unfortunate girl to the eldest son, that accomplished coxcomb, who I have but too much reason to believe made her a very bad husband.—My poor wife saw her error, I believe, when it was too late, and it broke her heart, but not before the death of poor Lady Cremona, who died in child-bed of her first child."

"Where was Lord Cremona's town-house?" asked Dr. Melbourne eagerly.

"In Albermarle Street," replied Lord Storrondale. "It has been uninhabited

now for several years, owing to the estate being in Chancery. Lord Cremona went abroad soon after my daughter's death, and I dare say you will be shocked to hear the companion of his journey. The detested Marrinelli; she had been his favorite from the time of his arrival in England, and had contributed not a little to the ill treatment he bestowed upon my daughter. About five years after he left England, we heard of his death at Florence, and a contention between two claimants to the Cremona estate, threw the whole concern into Chancery, where it still remains undecided."

"But what became of Lady Emily's child?" asked Dr. Melbourne.

"It was reported to have died," re-

plied Lord Storrondale, " a few days after its birth; but how far that report was true, remains to be proved, for there is a young lady now produced, who is stated to be that identical child."

" That *must* be a falshood," exclaimed the doctor.

" How so?" asked his lordship, with surprise.

" I should think so, at least," said Dr. Melbourne, instantly recollecting himself, " for I should suppose there could have been no inducement to conceal the child at the time of its birth."

" One should imagine so, to be sure," replied Lord Storrondale, " but nevertheless, the people who support the young lady's claim, seem to have their story very pat, for you may be

sure I felt sufficiently interested to make the closest enquiries. Indeed, I have gone so far as to procure an interview with the young lady. There is not the smallest resemblance in her features, either to Emily or Lord Cremona, but that is sometimes the case, and therefore is no proof that she is not their child. However, Sir Percival Egerton, who is the right heir at law, in failure of legitimate issue, has employed the ablest counsellor in England, and I am fully persuaded if there be any fraud he will detect it."

"Your lordship has astonished me very much by what you have told me," said Dr. Melbourne, "and I think it may be in my power to throw some further light upon this subject some

days hence. At present we will drop all farther conversation on that head, as I really begin to feel a strong inclination for something more substantial than talking."

"Upon my honour," answered Lord Storrondale, "you have had great patience to listen so long to a story so unconnected with any interest to yourself. We will now return towards town, and if I can command your attention '*chemin faisant*,' I will tell you a little more of my domestic troubles."

"Provided your lordship will walk as fast as you talk," answered the doctor, smiling.

"Agreed," said his lordship, and quickening his pace, he continued to address his friend in the following

terms:—"I have hitherto, my dear Melbourne, only imparted the sorrows of my first marriage to your friendly ear, and you know I have become a benedict twice since that period."

"I know it," answered the doctor, "and your lordship has let all the world know that your second choice was not a happy one."

"True, Melbourne," replied his lordship, "that was an act of necessity. When poor Emily, by her death, left me free to make a second election, I determined to fix upon a woman whose narrow circumstances should induce her to think herself on the obliged side, and whose natural softness of disposition should render her incapable of opposing my will. I was some time before I could

suit myself. At length I saw and admired the beautiful Lady Selina Desmond, a distant relation of my own. My pride was therefore satisfied as to nobility of descent, for I had determined not to marry an untitled lady, and the smallness of her fortune was no barrier to my inclination. The offers I made had been eagerly caught at by her needy relations, and the sweet soft souled dear herself never offering the slightest opposition, I imagined myself lucky in the choice I had made, and married my beautiful cousin. The sequel, however, proved that she had sacrificed her love to her ambition, or rather to the ambition of her friends, and that the poor girl was secretly attached to a young man, far more suit-

able to her age and taste than I could possibly be. Lady Storrondale, nevertheless, conducted herself wonderfully well for some years, and had she not been so truly insipid, I believe I should have been very fond of her. However, this *amant caché* of her's frequently visited at my house, and when the novelty of grandeur had lost its charms in the eyes of my wife, her smothered affection burst out with redoubled violence, and forgetting what was due either to herself or me, she abandoned my house, and flew to the arms of her first lover. I must own that I felt my degrading situation with all the violence natural tc my temper, and I proceeded as my resentment dictated, to get rid of the woman that had disgraced me. I

need not enter into the particulars of that miserable affair, they were made too public to need repetition ; for they must have reached even your secluded retirement."

" They did so," answered the doctor, " I must acknowledge I rejoiced to hear that for once your lordship had met with your match."

" You are vastly kind, upon my honour," said his lordship, " but for once you were mistaken, I had not met with my *match then*."

" You were doubtless not matched to your mind, my lord," said the doctor, " that happy union was reserved for your last choice. Permit me, however, to observe to your lordship, that I am rather surprised at your temerity, in

venturing a third time on the sea, where you had been twice shipwrecked. To be sure you must have been greatly tempted, for the newspapers speak in raptures of the present countess."

"And the papers are much in the right to do so," answered Lord Storrondale, "for they are well paid for what they say, and I only wish my domestic happiness were as perfect as they describe it to be. However, Lady Storrondale is certainly a very beautiful woman, a very tasty woman, and gives more elegant entertainments than any other lady in London; but believe me, there is as much of *Juno* as Venus in her composition, and I yield to her whims more for the sake of my own peace, than from any wish to indulge her. She has even

dared to be jealous of me too, and to reproach me with my infidelities. You may be sure *that* was a liberty I would not suffer to be taken with me, I therefore treated it with the severity it deserved. But Heavens! what a hurricane I raised about my ears. Surely, Melbourne, there is no animal so fierce as a vindictive woman. However, for once her ladyship found herself *equalled.* She did not find such a soft soul as her first helpmate in her present lord and master, and at length the thunder yielded to the rain, and we had plenty of sobbing and hysterics; those complaints I left to the care of her women, and since that period I have been unmolested by her ladyship's reproaches; but you may guess

the terms we live upon together, by what I have told you."

"I am sorry to hear your lordship draw so unpleasant a picture of your domestic happiness. I hope, however, your son and daughter make amends by their affectionate duty, for all your other disappointments."

"Indeed I can say but little on that head," answered his lordship. "My son is the wildest dog about town, and as unmanageable as an unbroken colt. His extravagance and his folly are inexhaustible sources of unhappiness to me. Evelina is a good girl, to be sure, soft and gentle, like her mother. You know she was by my second wife, but then the poor thing has always been

taught to think me such a bashaw, that she trembles at the very sight of me, as if I were Bluebeard himself; so that yes or no, or some such monosyllable is the utmost reply she can ever be brought to bestow upon me, and I am told she is very sensible, and highly accomplished; at least her governess, who is a woman of the highest abilities, says so, and the girl's countenance confirms it. I have endeavoured to win her by indulgence, but it is all the same, the pretty fool trembles and blushes, and courtesys, and stammers out her thanks, and then away she runs, the first moment she can do so with any decency."

"Your lordship may perceive by the tenor of your own life," said Dr. Melbourne, "that when the path of virtue

is said to be infested with thorns, the statement is erroneous. How much more painful is it to tread the crooked mazes of vice and folly; beneath the roses that adorn that deceitful labyrinth, lurk the serpents remorse, repentance, and unpitied anguish, ready to punish with their stings the errors of the thoughtless crew that tread their forbidden haunts. Whilst on the other hand——"

"Virtue is its own reward," interrupted Lord Storrondale, in a tone of impatience. "I know what you were going to add—and hark ye, Melbourne, now the preaching fit is come on you, I will wish you good morning, for I had rather you should fall upon the muffins

than upon me; but tell me, when will you play a game of chess with me?"

"When I am not in a *preaching mood*," answered the doctor, drily, "perhaps to-morrow evening, but I will let your lordship know, for I feel the propensity so strong upon me at present, that I cannot judge how long it may last."

CHAP. X.

A Modern Friend.

WHEN Dr. Melbourne returned to St. James's Square, he found Seraphina alone in the breakfast-room, for Lady Avondale had not yet descended from her toilet.—" Poor Sery, I suppose you are starving," said he, as he approached the breakfast table.

" Oh no, papa," replied she, " I have been so entertained with the newspapers,

that I quite forgot I wanted my breakfast. Look what a charming description here is of the Opera. Oh, I am dying to see Catalani! and look, papa, here is an account of such a delightful fête at Claredown-house—oh, if I could but see such an one. I wonder whether Lady Avondale knows the Claredowns."

"No doubt; she knows all the idle people in town. Never fear, girl, you will have enough of visiting, if you go to see all the fools she is acquainted with."

"But, papa," continued Seraphina, too intent upon the paper, to observe what he said; "but, papa, there were fifteen hundred people at this fête. What a sight it must be to see *fifteen hundred* people together full dressed.

I do really think it would turn my brain almost. And here are such long advertisements about bargains to be sold, Lady Avondale is going to take me shopping this morning, so I intend to shew her these names, that we may get our purchases cheap."

"A pretty jumble you have got in your head between opera singers, routs, and bargains. Oh, girl, girl, take care of your *brains.*"

Seraphina laughed at the doctor's caution, and just then Lady Avondale came into the room, arrayed in the most elegant morning-dress. The scantiness of its drapery, however, did not please the doctor, and he exclaimed, in his usual blunt manner. "Why, hey day, Sophy, have you been robbing the

bolster of its case? Sery has been talking to me of cheap dresses that are to be sold; but I think whilst so little is necessary to make one, there is no occasion for much study in the art of buying them."

"You may be a very sensible man, doctor," said Lady Avondale, "in matters of great weight, but in the lighter affairs of ladies' dress, we will dispense with your opinion, as I cannot help conceiving it may *err*."

"Believe me," replied the doctor, with a smile, "my opinion will never interfere again with your ladyship's attire, but I only beg you will not make a scaramouch of Sery."

"You may trust to the propriety of my taste, and my knowledge of every

thing *comme il faut*, doctor," answered her ladyship; "your dear Sery shall not trespass the bounds of decorum."

"I am only afraid of trespassing the bounds of my purse," said Seraphina, "for I have been reading of such bargains this morning, that positively should they answer the pompous description, I shall be tempted to buy them all."

"Remember your grandmother Eve, girl," said the doctor, "and beware of temptation."

"Yes, papa, so I will when the fruit is *forbidden*," answered Seraphina.

Lord Avondale now joined the breakfast party, and as soon as it was over, the doctor set out on his rambles, to call upon some of his old friends, and

to make those enquiries he had promised Lord Storrondale should engross his attention, until he saw him again. Although his lordship little imagined how warm an interest actuated the doctor in his intended exertions. Before he quitted the room, however, he called Seraphina to the window, and putting a bank-note into her hand, there are fifty pounds for you, child, said he, to buy trumpery, for I do not like the thoughts of your stripping your purse of its little hoards, as I know my girl does not lay out *all* her money in dress, and believe me, London is not destitute of objects to excite far more exquisite sensations than those awakened by the gratification of *vanity*."

" Papa," said Seraphina, her eyes filling with tears—" Dear papa, how indulgent you are to me! I will remember your injunction, and beware of temptation, for excessive would be my remorse, should I ever feel that heedless extravagance had deprived me of the power of relieving distress."

As she concluded her speech, Seraphina raised the doctor's hand to her lips, and he, nodding his head, with a good-humoured smile, quitted the apartment.

" I guess," said Lord Avondale, smiling at Seraphina, " that Dr. Melbourne has been drawing his purse-strings. Am I right, Miss Melbourne?"

" Yes, my lord," replied she; " my

kind friend has been making me an almost superfluous present, for I was rich before."

"I am curious to know," said Lady Avondale, "the extent of his highly praised generosity. May I ask the sum he gave you, without being impertinent?"

"Fifty pounds," answered Seraphina.

"And the sum you possessed before, and which constituted such immense riches?" again asked Lady Avondale.

"Two hundred pounds," said Seraphina, with naiveté.

"*Two hundred pounds!*" re-echoed Lady Avondale, lifting up her hands with affected astonishment: "Two hundred pounds, child! and you call that being rich!"

" Certainly I do," answered Seraphina, blushing; " it is a very large sum for such a girl as I am."

" Oh, immense to be sure!" said Lady Avondale, sarcastically. At Llanfallen it may be so, but in London, my dear, you will find it absolutely nothing. Why I have lost more than double that sum at a sitting."

" *Lost* it!" exclaimed Seraphina, with unfeigned surprise. " In what manner could your ladyship *lose* it?"

" Pharo and his host robbed her of it," said Lord Avondale; " but I hope my dear Miss Melbourne's good sense will secure her from the infatuation that has nearly proved fatal to her friend.— Lady Avondale," continued he, with solemnity, " I warn you not to pervert

the innocent mind of Miss Melbourne, or you may find me less indulgent than you have hitherto done."

So saying, his lordship took his hat, and instantly quitted the room.

"How soon the men assume the airs of a husband," said Lady Avondale, as soon as he was gone, "and how dearly they love to display their authority! But Lord Avondale had better take care," added she, "how he trifles with *my* feelings, or I may be tempted to awaken *his* in a manner he least expects."

Seraphina was too much shocked and surprised to make any reply to this address, and Lady Avondale continued. "I know what he builds his insolence upon," said she. "My passion for play

has led me perhaps too far sometimes, and a continued run of ill-luck had so far deranged my finances some time ago, that I was obliged to apply to Lord Avondale for rather a serious sum; he very generously gave it me, but after he had done so, lost all the credit of the action by meanly wanting to tie me down not to play any more. Did you ever know any thing so shabby?"

"And could you," said Seraphina, "refuse to oblige such an indulgent husband by the sacrifice of a silly amusement, or indeed, more properly speaking, by giving up a dangerous propensity?"

"What great indulgence do you allude to?" asked Lady Avondale.

"Was it not very indulgent," said

Seraphina, "not only to give you the money you required, but to forgive the fault, on the simple condition of not repeating it?"

"In what antediluvian terms you express yourself, child!" said Lady Avondale. "You talk of a husband's indulgence and forgiveness as if women were really the poor dependent creatures the men would wish to make them; but thanks to the liberal principles of the nineteenth century, we know better than to submit to such degrading bondage. Lord Avondale has certainly his fortune in his own keeping, but *I* have his *honor*, so let him look to it. I think he ought to have been extremely obliged to me for applying to him, rather than avail myself of any of those offers of

assistance which are continually pressed upon me by those who would esteem themselves superlatively happy in obliging me."

This was a language wholly unintelligible to Seraphina; her pure mind was incapable of embracing ideas so inimical to female dignity, as those to which Lady Avondale alluded, and she merely replied, "That being totally incompetent to judge of matters with which she was perfectly unacquainted, she could only say, that she would carefully avoid a propensity which appeared to confined ideas, replete with danger and disgrace. Do not, therefore, dear Lady Avondale," continued she, "ask me to partake of that perilous amusement."

"You will find it irresistibly alluring,"

answered her ladyship, "my dear girl, I am persuaded, without any invitation on my part; depend upon it, when you get sufficiently inured to high life to cast away the diffidence that now obscures the superiority natural to your understanding."

At this moment, the carriage was announced, and the ladies set out on the important business of shopping.

In the course of their ride, Seraphina learnt, with pleasure, that Lady Avondale visited at L——n House, and that another fête was announced in the course of three weeks, which was expected to eclipse the one Seraphina had been reading an account of, both in splendour and magnificence.

"I am in great hopes it will be a

masquerade," said Lady Avondale, "for that is my favorite amusement, and then my dear Seraphina will be delighted indeed."

"Your ladyship thinks then," said Seraphina, "that you have interest enough to procure me an invitation."

"Most certainly, my dear; I am upon the most intimate terms with the M——ss, and were I not, a girl of your beauty and fortune will not want for invitations, rest assured."

The carriage now stopped at Madame L——'s door, in St. James's Street, and Seraphina was presently ushered into that temple of taste, where the variety displayed before her, alternately pleased and tormented her, for so much was she delighted with every thing she

saw, that she was equally at a loss which to chuse, and which to reject: At length, after much indecision, she managed to pick out two morning-dresses, another which Lady Avondale told her would do for the Opera, and a complete full dress for her appearance at the grand route for which her ladyship had issued near a thousand tickets, and which was to take place in three days from that time.

Seraphina had not been accustomed to purchase her own clothes; Mrs. Melbourne had always reserved that care for herself, and her giddy pupil had till now been too happily careless to give herself a moment's concern upon the subject; the employment was therefore as new as it was pleasing. She was

now about to move in a new sphere, and in spite of all the philosophy Mrs. Melbourne had attributed to her, Seraphina felt new ideas of dress associating themselves in her mind, with those of the new scenes in which she was about to mix. She did not, therefore, pick out the least expensive dresses, as she would have done at Llanfallen, had the choice been offered to her. Conscious that she possessed a large sum of money, she felt careless of the expence she was about to incur; she accordingly assented to all Madame L———'s proposed improvements in making up the dresses from the patterns she shewed her, and heard with delight, the promise that was given of the whole order being sent home the next day.

"And pray don't forget to send the bill with them," said Seraphina, "for I always pay ready money."

Madame L—— courtesied low, but begged Miss Melbourne would not give herself any trouble upon that head, as she should be proud to have her name upon her books.

"Oh, I never was in debt in my life," said Seraphina. "Pray send the bill, for I cannot wear the dresses until they are paid for."

Madame courtesied and smiled, and inwardly ejaculated, "Would to Heaven all my customers were of the same mind!"

"What a silly girl you are, Seraphina," said Lady Avondale, when they were re-seated in the carriage, "to lay

such an emphasis upon paying your bills! You will be sorry for it by and by; when you have been a little while in London, you will find so many uses for your money, that you will not be able to pay all your bills directly."

"Then I will do without the things," said Seraphina, "for there is no necessity for going into debt for finery, at least."

"What puritanical notions you have, child! What do you think half the fine ladies would do in London, if they all thought as you did? Why there would be an end of trade. I suppose I don't owe Madame L—— less than four hundred pounds, and if I had been as scrupulous as you are, I should not have laid out half that sum."

" Four hundred pounds !" exclaimed Seraphina. " I am sure I should never sleep in my bed if I owed four hundred pounds. Dear Lady Avondale, why don't you pay the poor woman ? I am sure it must distress her sadly."

" Oh dear, no; you are quite mistaken. She is sure of her money some time or other, and that is more than she is with some of her customers; therefore she is very happy to serve me, for she charges me accordingly, I assure you."

" My dear Sophy," said Seraphina, with earnestness, " let me entreat you to awaken from this dream of error. You are throwing away money in impositions of which you are aware, that would assist the unfortunate in their

distress; and whatever you may say about Madame L——, I dare say she had rather have ready money than make the extra charge."

"I suppose Dr. Melbourne and my father have given you a deputation to preach to me," said Lady Avondale, stifling her resentment under a feigned gaiety; "but take care I don't make a convert of you, instead of becoming one to your musty doctrines. Remember, my dear girl, that I was once shackled by the very prejudices with which you now wish me to encumber myself. *Reason* has emancipated me from their bondage, and you might as well desire me to reassume my leading-strings, as submit to the musty precepts you inculcate."

Seraphina listened with silent concern,

to the loose principles Lady Avondale avowed. She was shocked at the disrespectful manner in which she spoke of the guides of her youth, and she exclaimed mentally, "Edward was right; Sophia is not a proper guide for such a giddy girl as I am. Would to Heaven I were once more safe at Llanfallen!"

However these serious ideas grew gradually fainter as the carriage conveyed her from one magazine of taste to another, nor did they again recur until Seraphina found, on her return home, that her purse was become most alarmingly light by the purchase of the numberless expensive articles of dress and ornament which Lady Avondale had *assured* her were indispensably necessary for her appearance in the fashionable world;

fifty guineas had been expended, and the bill from Madame L—— was still to come.

The various articles lay before her in her dressing-room, and Seraphina, in spite of her natural gaiety, was contemplating them with a pensive air, when the door opened, and Mrs. Evans came in.

"Bless my heart!" said she, "Miss Seraphina, what a parcel of things have come for you this morning! Nothing but knock, knock at the door, and then calling me from the top of the house to the bottom to take them of a parcel of pert boys that stared and grinned at me just as if they had never seed any Christian body in their lives before. One of them had the sauciness to say he wanted the

young lady's maid, and when I said as I was she, he laughed, and said, he thought such a reverend lady must be the *housekeeper*, or the *nurse*. So I told him to carry his nonsense back to his master, for that I dare say my young lady did not order any such thing to come home with what she had bought. And so then the fool sheered off, grinning just like a monkey. Oh, how I longed to box his ears."

Seraphina smiled, and began shewing Mrs. Evans what she had been buying. The old lady looked at them one by one—said they might be pretty to those that understood them, but for her part, she could not comprehend the use of half of them. "I hope they did not cost *much*, Miss Sery?" said she.

Seraphina sighed. "Fifty pounds, Evans," said she, mournfully.

"Good Lord deliver us!" answered Evans. "Fifty pounds for such gew-gaws! Dear heart! Miss Sery, what a deal of good you could do to the poor with half that sum, as you well knows by experience. To be sure you have taken care of your pensioners at Llanfallen, but I'll warrant you may finder ten times worser objects of pity in London, than ever could be seen in such a neighbourhood as our's, where all the gentlefolks are so good."

"Do you think there can be many poor people in London, Evans? I mean those in great distress," said Seraphina, naively. "*I* should think it impossible, where there is such a multitude of rich

people to help them in their want. Surely, if the poor at Llanfallen are well taken care of by the few families that can afford to assist them, the poor of London must be much better off in the very centre of riches and luxury."

"Not if all the rich people do as you have done this morning, Miss Seraphina, throw their money away in baubles they can do without. Extravagance always brings want, even to the richest; and if you lay out your money in finery, you cannot have it to give to the poor."

Seraphina felt the truth of this remark, and tears came into her eyes. "You are very right, Evans," said she; "I certainly could have done great good with the fifty pounds I have been laying

out this morning, but then I was in a manner obliged to buy most of the things, for Lady Avondale said they were absolutely necessary to make me look like other people; and Dr. Melbourne gave me fifty pounds this morning, so that I am still rich enough to do a great deal of good, if you will find me an opportunity."

"Look like other people indeed!" said Mrs. Evans, with a toss of her head. "God forbid you should ever look like other people, at least, such people as Lady Avondale. Good gracious! she looks for all the world like a painted jezabel."

Seraphina thought as Evans did, but she forbore to say so, and therefore tried to turn the conversation to another sub-

ject by asking if Dr. Melbourne was come in yet.

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Evans, "his reverence has got plenty of people to go and visit, and I hope he'll be able to find some better acquaintance amongst them for you, than what you are likely to meet with here; there are fine goings on, fine goings on, I assure you, as that pert miss of a lady's maid told me this morning, that joins in her lady's bad tricks, and then exposes her to the first stranger she meets with."

"My good Evans," said Seraphina, "I must beg that you will chuse another subject when you are speaking to me, for I cannot hear Lady Avondale railed against whilst I am an inmate of her house. Whatever I disapprove in

her conduct, I will endeavour to avoid in my own, but I cannot allow myself to listen to the slightest disrespectful word that is coupled with her lady-ship's name, not even from you, my good Evans."

"Well, to be sure," answered that faithful servant, in a tone of pevish-ness, "you must do as you like, Miss Sery, but it is very hard I must not tell you any thing that concerns you so nearly as the bad goings on in this house; but *howsomedever*, as I said be-fore, you must do as you like, though I dare say my Lady Avon-dale is not so squeamish about you."

Mrs. Evans was perfectly right in her conjectures concerning Lady Avon-dale, for no sooner did that lady enter

her dressing-room on her return from her morning excursion, than she vented the malice that had been brooding in her heart against the unsuspecting Seraphina, from the moment she had mortified her pride, by the display of principles so opposite to her ladyship's. Lady Avondale never paid her debts but when absolutely obliged to do so. The whole of her pin-money, together with large sums she frequently obtained from her too generous lord, being swallowed up in the vortex of gambling. "This country miss," said she to her confident, Mrs. Baily, "is come up to London to reform us all; I believe at least, such are the ideas her inordinate vanity suggests; but I am determined to pull her pride down, cost what it will. Do you

know," continued her ladyship, "she had the insolence to lecture me to-day about paying my trades-people. She makes it a rule, it seems, to pay ready money for every thing. She told Madame L—— so to-day, and you cannot think what an impertinent leer the milliner gave me as she spoke it, just as much as to say, I wish your ladyship would do the same."

"Dear me, my lady," said the canting Baily, "your ladyship may easily match her there. I am sure, if I was your ladyship, I would get all her money out of her at cards, and then how foolish she would look about her boasted payments."

"Yes, so I would, Baily, but the most provoking part of the matter is,

that she has made a wise resolution never to touch a card, so I can do nothing with these."

"Oh, a fig for her resolutions," answered Mrs. Baily, "she won't be able to keep them long, I warrant. La! I am sure it is no more possible to resist cards when one sees other people playing at them, than it is to fly in the air. But I'll tell your ladyship a thought that has just struck me; suppose you make up a long face, and borrow her money—does your ladyship know how much she has got?"

"That's a very clever thought, Baily," answered Lady Avondale, "and you are a charming creature for suggesting it. Yes, yes, I will do it. The silly thing has told me exactly the depth of her purse, and I'll have the whole treasure,

with the exception of a few guineas, before to-morrow morning, and then Madame L—— will have the honour she was coveting, '*Miss Melbourne's name in her books,*' and I'll take care the sweet creature shall not easily have her money back again to get the name out again."

"The money will be very acceptable too, I assure your ladyship," said Mrs. Baily, courtesying, "for do you know, my lady, that saucy man has been here about your ladyship's jewels, and he swears you shall not have them until he is paid the last sum he advanced."

"I *must* have them for Thursday, that's positive," said her ladyship, "or I shall be ruined, for my lord will find me out. This simpleton has not enough to get them, but perhaps I may win

sufficient to-night, if I stake her money. Oh, apropos, I must go and tell her to dress for the party this evening, for she knows nothing about it. I would not mention it this morning for fear she should order a dress for the occasion, as I wish her to appear the first time to the greatest possible disadvantage."

" Her *Welch* wardrobe," said Mrs. Baily, with a sneer, " will not produce any thing *very killing*, I dare say, particularly when the duties of the toilet are performed by such an abigail as the one Miss Melbourne has brought with her. I declare she looks exactly as if she was just come out of the tombs in Westminster Abbey, my lady. Has your ladyship seen her?"

" Yes, I have, Baily, and I must con-

fess," answered her ladyship, "that I should never have thought of making such an animal a high priestess of Venus, but it is fitting that such an oddity as the lady, should have as great an oddity for her maid; they are well matched. Take that embroidered muslin robe, Baily, I shall not wear it any more, and you deserve it for your witty thought."

Baily simpered, and smiled, courtesied, and thanked her lady over and over; for the beautiful present, which had indeed been worn only twice, and which, with a long list of etceteras, stood in the unpaid bill of an indigent tradesman, who had made frequent, but unregarded applications for the payment of a sum that would have saved him from bankruptcy; it could not be obtained, and the un-

happy man sunk into ruin; for he was not of the number of those nefarious cheats who make their fortune by breaking.

When Lady Avondale heard of his misfortune. "I always thought he was a needy creature," said she, in an unfeeling tone, "he was so tiresome about his paltry bills. Yet, on that very morning she put her name down for ten guineas to a charitable subscription that was supported by some very fashionable people, and was praised for her tender sensibility and extreme *benevolence*, a character her ladyship was very ambitious of possessing, although vanity had absorbed every softer feeling of her soul.

CHAP. XI.

A Dangerous Compliance.

LADY AVONDALE tapped at Seraphina's door just as the latter had finished her toilet. "My dear girl," said her ladyship, with the most winning softness in her tone and manner, "you look divinely to-day. I come to tell you I have a small party to-night, and to desire you would make an addition to your dress on that account; but that

injunction is unnecessary, for upon my honour, I think the simple elegance of your attire exceeds any thing the most studied dress could bestow upon your appearance."

"I am glad you like my dress, Sophy," said Seraphina, "but indeed I have no merit whatever in the choice of it. My dear mamma, as I always call Mrs. Melbourne, has saved me that trouble till now. This morning was the first time I ever took thought for what I was to put on, and upon my word I am sadly discontented with myself; for I think I have been very extravagant."

"Not at all, my dear, indeed," said Lady Avondale; "on the contrary, I thought you absolutely stingy."

" I should be sorry to deserve that character," said Seraphina; " but I ought to be careful; Mrs. Melbourne has taught me the true value of money, by shewing me the happiness a wise distribution of it can diffuse around us. I hope I shall not be long in town before I meet with some worthy objects of compassion. Evans tells me this great city abounds with distress, although it is the companion of magnificence and luxury."

" Evans is very right," answered Lady Avondale, tears swelling into her eyes, with well acted sensibility, " and nobody knows the anguish I sometimes endure when I cannot contribute what I wish to the relief of those who come under my own knowledge."

Seraphina was pleased when she heard Lady Avondale speak with such apparent feeling, and she thought to herself, dissipation may have warped Sophia's principles, but the natural goodness of her heart still remains.

"If I thought," continued Lady Avondale, in the same tone—"if I thought my dear Seraphina would not betray me, I would entrust a subject of secret regret that now preys upon my heart, to her friendly bosom, and perhaps the goodness of her heart may suggest some remedy for the evil."

"I am sure," answered Seraphina, quite softened by so unexpected a confidence, "if my dear Sophia honours me with such a mark of her friendship, she need not fear any indiscretion on my

part, and I shall consider myself truly fortunate if I can contribute to the serenity of her mind."

"You are a sweet girl," replied her ladyship, taking Seraphina's hand, "and I *will* trust you, only entreating you, happen what will, that you will not mention the circumstances to Dr. Melbourne; you will promise me that; won't you?"

"Certainly," replied Seraphina, little thinking the compact she was entering into.

"Well then, my dear," said the artful Sophia, "you must know that sometime ago a tradesman with whom I deal, discounted a note of mine to oblige me, and I promised to assist him in an equal degree at any time should his

necessity require it. The poor man has just sent to me to say that he is arrested for one hundred and fifty pounds, and if I cannot let him have that sum to-night, he will be sent to prison, the affair will be made public, and his family will be ruined."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Seraphina, "what is to be done? Do you intend to let the poor man have the money? I don't know what is meant by discounting bills, but it appears to me that you promised—you ought to assist him."

"Yes, my love, and so I would," replied her ladyship, "but I have not ten guineas in the world; it happens so unlucky, if the poor man could wait until the day after to-morrow, I could let

him have it, but that will be too late then."

"I have just the sum by me," said Seraphina, "but I cannot part with it all, for I have promised to pay the milliner to-morrow."

"Never mind that, my dear," said Lady Avondale, eagerly, "I will speak to Madame L—— myself, I am sure two days can make no difference to her, and only think, it will save a whole family from ruin—let me have the money, there's a dear delightful creature, and I will adore you. The day after to-morrow I will return it to you, and then you may satisfy your punctilious delicacy."

"Oh dear," said Seraphina, looking wishfully at the baubles she had been

buying, and which still lay on the table, "I wish I had not been so silly as to throw away so much money in trifles I could do without. I could then have paid the milliner, and assisted your protegé too, but as it is, I cannot hesitate as to what I ought to do."

"No, that I am sure of," interrupted Lady Avondale, "my dear Seraphina will not hesitate about relieving such distress as that I have described to her, in preference to paying a paltry milliner."

"Your ladyship is mistaken," said Seraphina, "that milliner may perhaps be in distress equal to the tradesman you have been talking of, and the disappointment of money she depends upon, may be of the most serious con-

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sequence to her. I shall therefore reserve enough to pay her, and the rest is at your ladyship's service. It would be iniquitous in me to employ money that does not belong to me, however noble the motive that might be alleged as an excuse."

Lady Avondale was mortified to see such steadiness in a girl of Seraphina's age, and particularly as the giddiness of her manner seemed to promise a very different disposition. She tried all the rhetoric she was mistress of, to endeavour to shake her resolution, but without effect, and was obliged to accept of the proffered hundred pounds, instead of the hundred and fifty she had requested. Her ladyship, however, consoled herself with the hope that at some

future period, she should be more successful. Poor Seraphina had soon cause, however, to repent her too easy compliance with the request of her dangerous soi-disant friend, and bitterly to lament the imprudent promise which had been exacted from her, of concealing the transaction from Dr. Melbourne.

At dinner, Lord Avondale appeared in high spirits. " My dear Sophia," said he, as soon as Lady Avondale came into the room, " I have great news to tell you."

" Some silly thing, I dare say ;" said her ladyship, with affected indifference, " What is it, my Lord ?"

" You hardly deserve to be told,"

replied her husband, " but I *will* indulge you. Your brother Robert is made a post captain; he has been in a successful engagement with two French line of battle ships. The contest was severe, as the force of the enemy was infinitely superior to ours, which consisted of two frigates only. The captain of the vessel to which your brother belongs, was killed at the beginning of the engagement, and Robert immediately took the command. His conduct displayed a mixture of courage and prudence, joined to nautical skill, that he has been appointed to the command of one of the captured ships, in consideration of his services. He is expected every day at Portsmouth with his prizes, and as he

will have leave of absence whilst his new vessel is repairing, we shall see the young hero in London."

"And be pestered to death with his boisterous manners," said Lady Avondale, in a languid tone, "Robert is certainly one of the least polished of our British tars."

"He was always a noble fellow," said Dr. Melbourne, "and a great favourite of mine. I believe he would not flatter the Great Mogul himself, but he is nothing deficient in good-nature.—Which do you like best, Sery—Robert or Edward?"

"Edward, to be sure," replied Seraphina, "for Robert was always teazing me, and tearing my frocks, or spilling the ink upon them; but it is several

years since he visited Llanfallen. I dare say he is not so rude now."

"Oh! he is worse than ever, I assure you," said Lady Avondale, "it is a perfect martyrdom to pass one evening with him."

"It is to be hoped," said Dr. Melbourne, "that his grateful country will make amends to Captain Pembroke for the deficit in his sister's affection, or he had better have fallen in the engagement; patriotism ought to supply the place of natural affection in your ladyship's bosom, and make the hero welcome if the brother is not so."

"Why, dear doctor, every body is not such a patriot as yourself," said Lady Avondale, "and as I think women have nothing to do with politics, I content

myself with my proper sphere, and like those only, who make themselves agreeable to my particular taste."

"I flatter myself," answered the doctor, with some asperity, "that few *men* will be ambitious of your ladyship's approbation, if genuine merit, like your brother's, be excluded, and the successful candidates must resemble those insignificant animals I saw here last night. When you wish to enlarge your society it would be wise to send for a cargo of monkies and parroquets."

"What a cynic Dr. Melbourne grows," whispered Lady Avondale to Seraphina, "upon my honour it is quite a bore to be near him."

Lord Avondale felt hurt at the total want of feeling displayed by his lady,

but had too much of that fashionable folly that prescribes indifference between husband and wife, to suffer his emotion to appear. His heart was formed for the sweet interchange of affection, and had he met with a congenial soul in the wife he had selected, he would most probably have risen above the prejudices of folly, and exchanged fashionable celebrity for domestic happiness: as it was, he yielded to the torrent that carries the multitude along, and forbore to expect any pleasure in the circle of home, excepting such as could be obtained by attracting thither in crowds, the light, the giddy, and the vain. In the evening the elegant suit of rooms, appropriated for company, were brilliantly illuminated,

and presently the thundering knocker announced the arrival of guests. Seraphina, who had been told by Lady Avondale, that she expected a *select party*, was astonished at the throng of fine people that filled the rooms; her narrow capacity would never have suggested the possibility of an *hundred select friends*. Amongst the gay throng she presently observed Mr. Lessingham and Sir Percival Egerton. The latter flew to her the instant he found her out, and addressed her with his usual levity.

" Lovely Miss Melbourne," said he, " what punishment do you think you merit for the sufferings you inflict. I have not known a single instant of repose since I beheld you last night."

"Your looks do not bear testimony to your words," said Seraphina, laughing, "and whilst that is the case, I shall not be much alarmed either at your sufferings, or my threatened punishment."

"Innured to cruelty, I perceive," answered the rattle. "Oh, I dare say, the slaying of lovers has been considered as pastime ever since you left off playing with your dolls. I make no doubt, were I transported at this moment into Wales, I should find the mountains you have crossed in your journey hither, strewed with the dead carcases of your quondam lovers, who expired when the atmosphere was no longer impregnated with your balmy breath."

"If you continue to persecute me in this manner," said Seraphina, "wherever

you meet with me, it is *I* must complain of sufferings; it is *I* must threaten punishment."

At this instant Lady Avondale came up to Seraphina. "My dear," said her ladyship, "the Marchioness of Claredown and her three daughters are dying to be introduced to you, let me lead you to them."

"And when the young marquis is introduced to you, Miss Melbourne," said Sir Percival, "beware of your heart, for he is allowed to be the most accomplished young nobleman in England. Ah me! perhaps *he* is the happy mortal who is destined to awaken sensibility in that heart which has hitherto been reckless of the power of love."

"Pray, Sir Percival," said Lady Avon-

dale, "how came *you* so well acquainted with the state of Miss Melbourne's heart?"

"I read it in the liquid lustre of her eye," replied he, in a mock tragic tone. "There sits enthroned in cruel state, Indifference, mischief-loving fiend! and deals distraction on mankind."

Seraphina laughed heartily at Sir Percival's poetical picture; her face was formed for mirth, and there was a witchery in her mouth when she laughed, that was irresistible.

Lady Avondale saw but too plainly the impression her beauty made upon every one that beheld her, and she wished not to prolong a conversation which, by exciting her mirth, gave fresh charms to her lovely counte-

nance. She therefore led her away to the other side of the room, where the Marchioness of Claredown, and her daughters, Lady Barbara, Lady Charlotte, and Lady Elinor Hamilton, were seated.

The party rose as Lady Avondale drew near, and they received Seraphina with the most flattering expressions of kindness.

The marchioness was a beautiful woman, in the meridian of life, and the three young ladies were more elegant and fashionable, than beautiful; yet with the aid of dress, they passed for *lovely* women, and were praised in all the fashionable papers of the day, as paragons of beauty, under the title of the *Three Graces.*

Seraphina, who was quite a novice in the art of dissembling, never imagined how little it costs well-bred people to make professions of sentiments they never felt; she was therefore enchanted with the urbanity of the young ladies, and flattered herself she should be lucky enough to be able to select one intimate friend, at least, from the group, who would compensate, by the charms of her society, for the severe disappointment she felt in Lady Avondale's.

These hopes were, however, of short-lived duration, for the frivolity of the ensuing conversation soon convinced her, that at least, there was but little congeniality of soul between her new acquaintances and herself.

Lady Charlotte, who was the most

communicative, seated herself next Seraphina, and began amusing her, or attempting to do so, at least, by ill-natured remarks upon every body present, particularly the ladies. "Don't you admire that tall lady in the pale blue robe?" said she, pointing her out to Seraphina.

"She is lovely indeed," answered the candid girl, little expecting what was to follow; "her complexion is dazzling."

Lady Charlotte laughed. "I perceive," said she, "that you are quite *new*. Why, do you know, that dazzling complexion you admire so, is entirely art? She is painted both red and white."

"Impossible!" said Seraphina; "I can perceive her veins."

"They are painted too. It is Miss Pomeroy, the great heiress. There is such a fuss about her beauty and her fortune, that I am quite sick of both; but my maid lived with her once, and she assures me the girl is quite a fright before she is made up of a morning."

Seraphina felt quite disgusted with such palpable ill-nature, and she endeavoured to turn the conversation by asking what her ladyship thought of Catalani.

"She *sings* very well, to be sure," answered Lady Charlotte, "and one *must* admire her, because it is the fashion; but between you and I, she is not such a beauty as the men cry her up for."

In short, if you believed Lady Charlotte, there was not such a thing to be

found as a beautiful woman, although to consult your eye, you would be led to imagine that they abounded in those very apartments. No doubt her ladyship made *herself* an exception to her general rule for ugliness; but as that was a mental reservation, it was apparent only in the particular faults she pointed out, and the comparisons she made. Such a one was awkwardly tall—she was several inches taller than *herself*. How much preferable black eyes were to *blue*—Lady Charlotte's were black; she hated *long* faces—her own was remarkably *short:* and thus by shewing what could *not* be handsome, she plainly described what she thought *must* be so, and in the description, drew an exact picture of herself.

Seraphina, who was good-nature personified, shrunk from the idea of associating with a mind so diametrically opposite to her own, and she felt quite relieved when Lady Avondale came to request Lady Charlotte's company at the Pharo-table.

"You play, Miss Melbourne," said Lady Charlotte, "don't you?"

"Never," replied Seraphina; "I have no idea of any species of gaming."

"Oh, but we will teach you; so come along, for positively I cannot go without you."

"Your ladyship does me honor," said Seraphina: "but I must be excused; my resolution is not to be shaken, I assure you."

"Miss Melbourne is one of the

reformers of the age," said Lady Avondale, with a sneer, "and therefore we must not expect to enlist her in the corps of folly. But come," continued her ladyship, "it will not contaminate your purity, I hope, to look on."

Seraphina felt mortified at being laughed at, but she continued firm nevertheless in her determination not to play; yet to avoid too great particularity, she followed the two ladies to the Pharo-table.

There, however, the persecution was renewed with increased violence; for as it had been whispered about that Miss Melbourne, the *great beauty*, was heiress to a large fortune, the avaricious and the needy were equally eager to fleece her; and their disappointment

was proportionate to their eagerness when they found their destined *pigeon* towered above their reach on the pinions of unshaken virtue.

Innumerable then were the sneers that flew from one to another in whispers loud enough to be heard by the person they were intended to disconcert. One lady supposed Miss Melbourne was a *Methodist*, another that she was too *stingy* to risk her money, and a third that she gave herself the air of not playing that people might suppose she was very *charitable*.

Seraphina heard all these liberal conjectures, and felt extremely awkward to find herself the object of general observation; at length, she observed Dr. Melbourne at the other end of the apart-

ment, and she determined to go and seat herself by his side for the remainder of the evening.

Before she could reach him, however, he had entered into conversation with a gentleman of a very commanding appearance; he was tall and elegant, and his features were still fine, although the traces of age were upon his countenance. Seraphina checked her footsteps when she found the doctor engaged, and seated herself upon a sopha at a little distance, intending to speak to him as soon as the gentleman he was engaged with, should have left him.

She had not been many minutes in her new situation, when she was observed by the Honorable Mr. Lessingham, who

immediately availed himself of the opportunity of paying his devoirs to her.

When that gentleman expressed himself to Lady Avondale in so contemptuous a manner of Seraphina, he was far from feeling as he spoke. He was as much struck with the beauty of the novice he pretended to despise, as the volatile Sir Percival Egerton, but he knew Lady Avondale too well to suppose she would bear his *avowed* admiration of a person she so evidently wished to depreciate; he therefore concealed his real sentiments under the guise of contempt, and effectually put her ladyship off her guard.

"How extremely fortunate do I esteem myself," said the fop, addressing Seraphina, as he seated himself by her

side, "in thus finding an opportunity of paying my compliments to the most lovely of her sex."

Seraphina smiled with an air of unbelief, and answered with a bow, for Mr. Lessingham had passed her with a slight inclination of the head, at his first entrance, and without deigning to speak to her. Lady Avondale was then with her, but Seraphina had no idea of that circumstance occasioning a difference.

"Miss Melbourne does not make it a principle, I hope, to treat her admirers with cruelty?" asked Mr. Lessingham, with an air of affected languor, which he intended should be extremely pathetic, but which acted upon the feelings of Seraphina in a very opposite manner, who, already diverted by the foppishness

of his dress, and the excessive conceit that characterised his every movement, found it impossible any longer to suppress her laughter.

Incapable of supposing, for an instant, that *he* could become an object of ridicule, Mr. Lessingham asked Seraphina if she was quizzing an old lady who passed them at that moment. "Lady Evelyn," said he, "is the most intolerable old cat that ever existed; her paint, and her ridiculous juvenile dress, give me the vapours to look at her. Don't you think so, Miss Melbourne?"

"I did not observe her ladyship," answered Seraphina.

"Ah, sorceress!" exclaimed the self-sufficient Lessingham, "with what an air of innocence do you reject the impu-

tation of the mischief that sparkles in those intelligent eyes. A mind so new to the world as yours, what an infinitude of ideas must it offer for your delassement! Tell me, lovely Miss Melbourne, what impression the great world makes upon your unsophisticated mind, at least, the small portion of it you behold in this confined circle, for as yet your senses have not been dazzled by the full blaze of magnificence that awaits them."

"The impressions I have received," answered Seraphina, "are as varied as the objects by which they were made. Your question, therefore, is too indefinite, sir, to admit of the possibility of my answering it."

"I must be categorical in my interrogatories, I perceive," answered Mr.

Lessingham, " to begin, therefore, with the ladies. What does the charming Miss Melbourne think of our fashionable belles—is folly or beauty most predominant?"

" The beauty of the ladies that compose this party, is too general, and too evident, to need any comment from *me*," answered Seraphina. " Of their folly I cannot possibly judge, stranger as I am amongst them. The few with whom I have conversed, appeared remarkable for their *good-nature*."

" Heavens! what a trait have you discovered!" exclaimed Lessingham, " perceptible only to yourself, I firmly believe; or perhaps the suggestion is mischievous, and intended only as *pointed* irony to display the too striking

deficiency in the very quality you praise. But tell me, lovely girl, have the gentlemen commanded enough of your attention to make you form an opinion of any individual?"

"Excepting yourself, sir, Lord Avondale, and Sir Percival Egerton, I have not conversed with any gentleman since my arrival."

"I can easily anticipate your opinion of both Avondale and Egerton. The first is absolutely Mother Goose in male attire, and the other the magpye of every fashionable party. But tell me, lovely Miss Melbourne, in what degree of estimation do you hold the warmest of your admirers, your adoring Lessingham. Oh, tell me, and make me the happiest of men!"

"I cannot imagine," said Seraphina, "how *my* opinion of you can influence *your* happiness, sir."

"It does indeed, enchanting girl, and therefore I entreat you to withhold it no longer."

"Well then," said Seraphina, laughing, "I think you very *amusing*."

"Excuse me, Miss Melbourne," replied Mr. Lessingham, disappointed at the answer she had given him, "Excuse me, but I fancy *amusing* was not exactly the expression you intended to make use of."

"Indeed it was the only expression that could convey my meaning," answered Seraphina: "*you* amuse me, Sir Percival Egerton torments me, and Lord Avondale commands my respect

and esteem; so if you have not *antici-pated* exactly right, blame yourself, and not me."

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated the mortified Lessingham, "who shall in-still taste into the bosom of a provincial dowdy? The girl has vegetated so long on her Welch mountain, that she is incapable of appreciating any thing above the standard of the goats that browsed around her." Then speaking in a voice that Seraphina could hear, "Miss Melbourne is as yet a stranger," said he, "to the refinement of good-breeding; a more intimate acquaintance with the manners of the *nous autres*, will, however, inform her that the atten-tion of a man of *my* consequence is

something above the amusement of a mere girl.

This speech, which he imagined contained the very acmé of eloquent declamation, was pronounced with an air of self-approbation and conceit, that completely destroyed the gravity which had began to shade Seraphina's countenance at the beginning of his harangue, and she burst into a fit of laughter.

" *Ideot!*" exclaimed Mr. Lessingham, as he rose from his seat, and turning on his heel, left Seraphina to enjoy her ill-timed mirth alone.

The exclamation was so loud, however, that it attracted the ear of the gentleman who was talking to Dr. Melbourne, and he turned round to observe

who had incurred such a degrading epithet, but no sooner had his eye caught the form of Seraphina, than he started, and turning pale, he laid hold of Dr. Melbourne's arm to save him from falling.

"By what magic," said the stranger, who was Lord Storrondale, "do I behold the exact image of my murdered Emily? Oh! Melbourne, tell me who is that lovely girl."

"If your lordship will acompany me into another room," answered the doctor, "I will tell you all I know concerning her, and then your lordship shall judge whether she has any just claim to the likeness you have attributed to her."

Lord Storrondale complied with the doctor's request, who led the way to his

own dressing-room, where he related to his astonished auditor, those particulars which are already known concerning Seraphina, and the manner in which she was confided to his care.

Lord Storrondale was much agitated during the relation of the narrative, and often interrupted the doctor by exclamations of astonishment; and when he had concluded, "I am astonished, Melbourne," said his lordship, "how you could conceal a circumstance of such moment to my happiness, as well as the happiness of my grandchild, when you confess that you thought from the first moment, that she was the offspring of my unfortunate Emily. What infatuation could possess you to do so?"

"Your lordship seems entirely to for-

get," answered Dr. Melbourne, "that I bound myself by the most solemn oath to the dying lady, that I would not entrust any creature but my beloved wife, with the mysterious story, until the child had attained the age of eighteen, at which period, she promised it should be claimed by the Lord Chancellor, and her birth-right fully invalidated."

"I beg your pardon," said his lordship, "I had forgotten that circumstance. You have never had any claim made, however, for the child, have you?"

"None, and that is what puzzles me extremely. I have been endeavouring to dive into the strange mystery of the supposed heiress, but all is dark and impenetrable. There is, without doubt,

a young person in existence who is said to be Lady Cremona's daughter; I have found out that she is at Camden House School, but it is impossible to trace the matter any farther, as under the pretence of regard for her safety, no person can see her, but those who have the immediate care of her person."

"This is strange indeed," said Lord Storrondale, "I suspect the quarter from whence the treachery arises, but I will fathom it to the bottom, I am determined, for Seraphina's face carries conviction in every feature; it is impossible she should be the daughter of any other than my Emily. I dare not trust myself with speaking to her at this moment, I shall therefore request you to bring her to my house to-morrow,

for I long to press her in my arms. Some more eligible chaperone must be found for her too, than I fear Lady Avondale will turn out to be; but that must be a future consideration. I am too much agitated to return to the company; you must apologize for my abrupt departure, by attributing it to illness. Lord Storrondale then rang for his carriage, and departed, and Dr. Melbourne returned to the company. When Seraphina saw Dr. Melbourne leave the room with Lord Storrondale, she felt the most sensible mortification, as she had depended upon finding an asylum by the side of her revered friend from the impertinences to which she was exposed, by being left without any person to speak to, with whom she was ac-

quainted. The manner in which Mr. Lessingham had expressed his resentment had disconcerted her by its rudeness, and put an end to the innocent gaiety that had excited his displeasure; for some time she sat upon the sofa musing upon her unpleasant situation, without recollecting that her being quite alone rendered her very conspicuous. Her pensive air had given a new turn to her beauty, and unconscious as she was of her power, she soon became the magnet that attracted universal attention. She was roused from her reverie by the following words, pronounced in the sweetest voice imaginable: "Will you deem me an impertinent intruder, madam, if I presume to remind you of a circumstance that I am persuaded

you are unconscious of; the eyes of the whole company are fixed upon you. Seraphina started up with the utmost precipitation, her face covered with crimson blushes, and raising her eyes to the person who had addressed her, she beheld a very elegant young man, of the most interesting countenance imaginable, whose eyes beaming with intelligence, were fixed upon her face with a look of profound admiration. "Permit me, Miss Melbourne," continued he, "to have the pleasure of conducting you to Lady Avondale. Her ladyship will introduce me to the honour of your notice, and make me as happy as she has already made my mother and my three sisters."

Seraphina immediately understood that

it was the Marquis of Claredown who addressed her, and recollected with a blush, the caution Sir Percival had given her to beware of his fascination. This completed her confusion, and she could only courtesy in silence, and permit him to lead her into the next apartment, where Lady Avondale still continued at the Pharo-table.

It may not be amiss in this place to give a description of the young marquis to our readers, as *he* was the happy mortal, as Sir Percival had foreteld, who was to awaken the first flutter in the bosom of the hitherto indifferent Seraphina.—His lordship was tall, and extremely elegant, both in his form and dress, and his face was one of that fine oval kind, that are so well calculated to give manliness to beauty.

His eyes were dark and penetrating, yet expressive of a tenderness that made them peculiarly pleasing to women; his long dark eyelashes and eyebrows gave a look of sense to his countenance, which was heightened by his aquiline nose, and clear olive complexion. His forehead was exquisitely turned, and its whiteness was set off by the dark locks that partially shaded it; his mouth had a striking sweetness in its expression, as well when it was serious as when it displayed the even rows of pearly teeth that adorned it. Joined to this fascinating exterior, Lord Claredown could boast a fine understanding, cultivated by study, and refined by an intimate commerce with the greatest wits of the age. His manners were those of a

finished gentleman, and whatever vanity might lurk concealed in his heart, his exterior was untinctured by the slightest tint of that degrading weakness. Yet are we obliged to acknowledge with regret, that notwithstanding these powers of pleasing, Lord Claredown was far from being a perfect character; it seemed as if Heaven had delighted in adorning him to shew the fallacy of all human perfection, when not seconded by virtue. Lord Claredown's heart was formed by nature in the mould of goodness, but the adulation that ever waits on greatness, unless guarded with unceasing vigilance, had warped its genuine tendency, and his successes with the fair sex had given him a taste for coquetry, that had been often attended

with the most fatal consequences. Numberless innocent unsuspecting hearts had been beguiled of all their happiness long ere they were aware of the danger that awaited them. Several victims had sunk into premature graves, and others had sought revenge for his perfidy in marriages with the objects of their aversion. Coquetry in women is universally detested, and held up as the object of just abhorrence to every thinking mind; but small are the evils that can be inflicted by the female coquet, when compared with those diffused around him by the male deceiver. A man, if he is dubious of a woman's sentiments towards him, can always bring her to an explanation when he pleases. Not so the hapless female, who, caught in the

toils of tender affection, trembles lest the object of her choice should not feel the tenderness he professes. The thousand nameless attentions which constitute the most delicate declaration of love, and which are best calculated to win the guileless heart, are in themselves nothing; and although it is impossible they should be shewn without design; yet such is the privilege of *man*, that he can retract them when he pleases with impunity, and wonder with well feigned surprise, how the silly girl could take a little simple gallantry for a declaration of love, observing with a shrug, that he must "*take care* what he says for *the future*."

But to return from this long digression, to Seraphina, who, as she walked

across the room with the marquis, was met by the incorrigible Sir Percival Egerton.

"What evil planet," whispered he, in Seraphina's ear, "has the ascendancy in my horroscope this evening?—Oh! Miss Melbourne, it is all over, I perceive—you have seen the all-subduing marquis, and there are no longer any hopes for the unfortunate Percival."

Seraphina smiled. "Heavens forbid," said she, "that my affections should be obliged to keep pace with your rapid imagination."

"Bless you for those consoling words," interrupted the rattle; "reviving to my drooping soul as the soft dew drops of summer to the parched bosom of the earth; be slow, be cautious,

lovely Seraphina, and trust not to the tinsel of *outward appearance.*"

Having uttered this caution with a look expressive of the most earnest entreaty, Sir Percival passed on, and Lord Claredown said with a smile, "That is an agreeable rattle, Miss Melbourne, is he not? Do you know what he is called in the beau monde? The agreeable butterfly—is it not an appropriate title?"

Seraphina assented with a smile, and just then they reached the table where Lady Avondale was seated. Her ladyship had been unsuccessful, and rage, disappointment, and terror were pictured on her countenance. Seraphina was shocked at the picture she displayed, and mechanically drew back; but Lady

Avondale held out her hand—" You are come most opportunely, my dear creature," said she, " to assist me. I have had the most shocking luck this evening, and have absolutely lost *all* my money. Lend me fifty pounds, there's a love, I shall be able to repay you in less than half an hour."

Seraphina shuddered at the cruel request, since Lady Avondale well knew that she had asked her for *all* she had in the world—money too, that she had refused her in the morning for a purpose so much more honorable to her feelings, for Seraphina entertained not a single doubt of Lady Avondale's sincerity when she had pretended to her that she wanted the hundred pounds to assist a distressed tradesman.

" I know not what to do," said Seraphina, in a hesitating tone. " I have not my purse with me, and the apartments are so full, it is quite tremendous to me to pass through them. I have found great difficulty in coming hither, but if your ladyship is really distressed I *must* attempt it."

" You are a dear creature," said Lady Avondale, " and I am sorry to trouble you, but I am obliged to do it, for I have not a guinea left."

" Permit me, Lady Avondale," said the marquis, " to have the honour of being your banker. Miss Melbourne cannot possibly pass the rooms again without encountering innumerable difficulties. I have plenty of bank-notes about me, and you certainly cannot ob-

ject to make use of them in preference to occasioning inconvenience to your charming friend."

As the marquis spoke, he presented an elegant pocket-book to Lady Avondale, who, impatient to recover the sums she had lost, waved all delicacy, and instantly accepted the offer. The marquis looked delighted, but Seraphina felt a horror creep over her whole frame, that threatened to be too much for her. She could not help thinking that the objections she had started respecting the money, had been the sole cause of Lady Avondale's imprudence, and a thousand times she wished she had not made them. The consciousness of wrong, Seraphina could not support, and she was obliged to rest her hand upon the back

of Lady Avondale's chair for support. The attentive marquis observed her pale cheek, and the tremor that had seized her, and he immediately addressed himself to Lady Avondale with an entreaty for her permission to conduct Miss Melbourne to another part of the room, where he perceived his aunt, the amiable Lady Delauny seated. "I have not been formally introduced to Miss Melbourne," added his lordship, "and therefore dare not presume to ask so great a favour of herself."

"Miss Melbourne," said her ladyship, smiling, "this modest young gentleman is the Marquis of Claredown, and he is ambitious of the honour of introducing you to his aunt, and if I have any skill in augury, her ladyship is just

the person to suit your particular taste, and I am sure you will suit *hers*."

"To admire Miss Melbourne," said the Marchioness of Claredown, who was seated near Lady Avondale, "requires only the advantage of seeing her. I shall feel proud of her introduction to every branch of my family."

Seraphina gladly assented to a proposal that was to take her away from a scene so inimical to her feelings, as was presented by a gaming-table, and when after her introduction to Lady Delauny, they began to converse together, Seraphina found with delight, that she had at length met with a soul congenial to her own. The marquis joined in the conversation, and displayed an equal portion of solid sense and lively wit.

Seraphina was delighted, and her sparkling eyes and animated countenance bore testimony to the pleasure she experienced. With what rapture did the marquis contemplate the lovely creature before him, and mark every varied expression of her beautiful features. Lady Delauny was no less pleased with her "*charming* new acquaintance," as she continually called Seraphina.

"My dear Miss Melbourne," said she, "you are so very unlike most of the young ladies I know, that I shall consider my introduction to you as one of the most fortunate events of my life, provided I appear *half* so pleasing in your eyes as you do in mine."

"Ah, madam," replied Seraphina, "the flattering manner in which your

ladyship condescends to encourage my advances is too grateful to my feelings to be rejected, although my utmost stretch of vanity cannot suggest a claim to such a distinction."

"I perceive," said Lady Delauny, with a smile, "that we shall be excellent friends, and although there is a disparity in our years, there will be none in our sentiments. Such charming modesty as yours, my sweet girl, cannot fail of converting admiration into esteem."

"My cousin Harriet will rejoice in the events of this evening," said the marquis, addressing Lady Delauny.

"I flatter myself she will have reason," replied her ladyship, "for if Miss Melbourne honours her with her friend-

ship, she will no longer have to lament the total want of society, of which she now so often complains. "Would you believe it," continued she, turning to Seraphina, "I have *three* nieces, and yet my daughter has no *young* friend."

Seraphina looked astonished.

"That look so expressive of surprise, would soon evaporate," said the marquis, "were my sisters better known to you, Miss Melbourne. Their minds, like their pursuits, are too trivial to render them fit companions for a Seraphina Melbourne, or a Harriet Delauny. I speak it with regret, but I know I only anticipate the opinion you must form of them when a further intimacy shall fully develope their characters."

The time had passed so agreeably to

the happy trio, that Lady Delauny's carriage was announced before she had an idea that it was the hour she had ordered it. When her ladyship arose to depart, she pressed Seraphina's hand between both hers. "This conversation," said she, "has been so delightful to my feelings, that I shall be most eager to renew it, and I shall therefore call to-morrow at twelve o'clock, with a design of running away with you for a few hours, if my dear Miss Melbourne thinks she shall feel inclined to listen so soon again to the monotonous stories of an old fashioned creature like myself."

"Dear Lady Delauny," exclaimed Seraphina, with eagerness, her eyes sparkling with the purest joy, "Dear

Lady Delauny, how kind you are. I positively shall not sleep to-night, so elated am I with the sweet idea you have afforded me to dwell upon."

"Flatterer!" said Lady Delauny, tapping her with her fan, "I will go home and fancy you are *really* thinking of me."

"Ah, would to Heaven *I* could go home and enjoy the same enchanting illusion," said the marquis, in a low voice, to Seraphina, as he took his aunt's hand to conduct her to her carriage. Seraphina did not answer, but a sigh that escaped her at the moment, proved that the caution Sir Percival Egerton had given her respecting the marquis was at least necessary, though it might be useless.

A select party staid to supper, of which Sir Percival Egerton made one. Mr. Lessingham was invited, but he excused himself under the plea of indisposition. Lady Avondale was in high spirits. She had won a considerable sum, besides regaining what she had previously lost. Seraphina rejoiced to hear this circumstance, as she did not doubt that her ladyship had returned the borrowed notes to the Marquis of Claredown. In this conjecture, however, she was mistaken, as the abrupt departure of his lordship had prevented the possibility of it, had Lady Avondale wished it ever so sincerely. The marquis had not returned to the company after he escorted Lady Delauny to her carriage. His lordship's reason for not

returning may be easily guessed at; he feared Lady Avondale's ill fortune might continue, and he knew how painful it would be to her ladyship to apologize for her inability to acquit the debt she had incurred. Besides, Lord Claredown was a man of gallantry, and could fully estimate the value of conferring an obligation on a beautiful woman, particularly when that woman was both vain and extravagant. The consequence might be guessed by a less able calculator than the Marquis of Claredown.

At supper, Seraphina was seated next an old gentleman of the most forbidding aspect, whose ridiculous pretensions to youth and gallantry rendered him both absurd and disgusting; but she presently perceived, that however disagree-

able he might appear in *her* eyes, his attentions were received by the ladies, and his witticisms laughed at by the gentlemen, with a degree of toleration that astonished her. His introduction had informed her that he was called Sir Effingham Wilson, and Lady Charlotte Hamilton, who sat on the other side of Seraphina, assured her that the old baronet was a conquest worth attending to, for he was thought the richest man in England.

"I hope then," said Seraphina, "that your ladyship intends to attempt it."

"Oh, no, my dear creature," replied Lady Charlotte; "I laughed at his brutus one evening, and the old wretch

has never forgiven the affront, so I leave the field entirely to you."

"If laughing at his dress will forfeit his favour, I fear I shall soon lose my chance," said Seraphina; "for as he disclaims the reverence due to old age by his foppery, my usual inclination to laugh at whatever is ridiculous, will certainly prevail."

The old beau was determined, however, to engage Seraphina in conversation. He had learnt from Lady Avondale, that she came from Llanfallen; he therefore began talking of the *lovely* Miss Fanny Pembroke. "She is a sweet girl," said Sir Effingham, "but cold as the snow that tips her native mountains; however I do not despair of yet seeing

the charmer Lady Wilson. What say you, Lady Avondale, shall I call you sister?"

"You know, Sir Effingham, how ardently *I* wish for that event," said her ladyship, with a warmth that astonished Seraphina so much, that she exclaimed, "Good Heavens! can it be possible?"

"Yes, indeed, Miss Melbourne," said Sir Effingham, mistaking her meaning; "Miss Pembroke was so much her own enemy as to refuse the most brilliant settlement, added to the entire devotion of *my heart*: but she has had time for reflection since she went into the country, and I dare say she repents of her folly."

"We shall see that," said Lady Avondale, "when Fanny comes to

town, for I have written to invite her, and expect her answer every day."

"Propitious may it be!" said the old lover, with a grimace which he intended should look languishing, but which so completely overpowered Seraphina's gravity, that she burst into one of those fits of laughter that had been wont to provoke Edward.

The poor beau was disconcerted, and Lady Avondale looked angry.

Conscious that she had done wrong, Seraphina took the earliest opportunity of withdrawing after supper, which she easily obtained permission to do, as the company returned to the Pharo-table as soon as the social glass had circulated a few times.

As she was retiring, Sir Percival

Egerton caught hold of her hand. "Stay, cruel Miss Melbourne," said he, with a tragic air, "and learn the sins you have to repent of, before you close those brilliant eyes in slumber. You have banished the Marquis of Claredown, annihilated Sir Effingham Wilson, and put your humble servant to the *torture*. If there be forgiveness for crimes of *such* magnitude, what sinner need despair?"

"I hope, in making a catalogue of other people's sins," said Seraphina, laughing, "that you do not forget your own, Sir Percival."

"Ah! would to Heaven," said he, "that *one* sin were added to that long list."

"What sin can you *wish* for?" said Seraphina, with naiveté.

"The sin of *stealing your heart*, too cruel girl," answered Sir Percival, and was raising her hand to his lips; but Seraphina broke from him, and left the room.

"You will make that girl so intolerably vain, Sir Percival," said Lady Avondale, "by the adulation you pay her, that she will be insufferable. Do you know, she has offended Mr. Lessingham by her insolence, in a manner that he declares he will never forgive."

"Why, what did the lovely creature do?" asked Sir Percival. "Did she find out that his moustaches were of mouse-

skin? or did she tell him his carmine was a bad colour?"

"No; she laughed at him *in toto*," answered Lady Avondale, "and you know he never pardons that."

"Then e'faith he must quarrel with all his acquaintance," said Sir Percival. "Who the devil does he think can see him without laughing at him? Why he is folly and affectation epitomized. Dear mischievous charmer, I love her for her wit."

"Take care, Percival," said Lord Avondale; "ten to one but she will laugh at you in your turn."

"*De tout mon cœur*, and I will join in the laugh," answered Sir Percival.

"Yes," said Sir Effingham Wilson, "that is the best way; that is always

my plan. I really believe Miss Melbourne laughed at *me too*, but I don't heed it. She is a beautiful girl, and I don't know, if Fanny continues cruel, whether I may not turn my artillery against *her* heart; and then let her look to it, I will make her pay for her waggery."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Sir Percival, "I *am* then doomed to *despair*, for who can hope to rival Sir Effingham Wilson!"

"Why, I flatter myself," said Sir Effingham, "although I am rather advanced in life, I have not lost *all* my attractions, and gold, my dear sir, all powerful gold, will make up for what *may* be deficient. I am determined to have a beautiful woman for my wife,

and I will take care she shall shine brightest where the rest are bright."

"Come," said Lady Avondale, who felt piqued at the idea of Seraphina's rivalling her sister, "come let us drop this tasteless subject, and attend to our game. Sir Effingham, you shall sit by *me.*"

The ugly mortal grinned at the preference, and said, with a hideous leer, "Ah! divine Lady Avondale, who can resist when you command?" Then seating himself by her side, "See what it is," said he, "to be a favorite of Venus."

The party played till a late hour, and Lady Avondale did not retire to her pillow until she had lost all her winnings, and was indebted to Sir

Effingham Wilson, five hundred pounds. This debt was, however, compounded for by a gracious nod from her ladyship, and a promise that he should soon hear of *Fanny*.—Thus low will the proudest stoop, when vanity has led them into the labyrinth of *vice*.

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